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Three golden hairs

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The Three Golden Hairs
(More Plays for Children)

THE THREE GOLDEN HAIRS

(More Plays for Children)

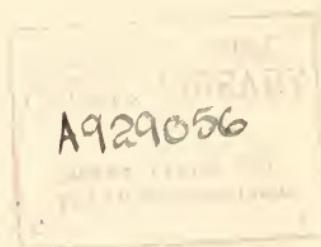
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ETHEL SIDGWICK



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PRINTED IN U.S.A.
BY THE MURRAY PRINTING COMPANY
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

THE MURRAY PRINTING COMPANY
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

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** * Applications for permission to perform either of these
plays should be made to the Publishers*

The Three Golden Hairs

(After Grimm)

CHARACTERS.

(*May be acted by twelve, with chorus.*)

STARLING, *a lucky boy.*
KING CROW of Croatia.
QUEEN WIMPLE, *his wife.*
PRINCESS PEARL, *his daughter.*
EELSKIN, *his Chancellor.*
MOLL, *Starling's mother.*
WAT the Tinker. These parts may be
FAG the Ferryman. doubled.
TWO BURGOMASTERS. These parts may be
TWO OUTLAWS. doubled.
HORN, *a Black Enchanter.*
HEDDA, *his mother.*
MILLER'S WIFE.
DUCHESS ANN, *the Queen's Lady.*
*Chorus of Prentices, Girls, Foresters, Imps
and River-fairies.*

[MOLL, FAG, HEDDA and OUTLAWS, as well as
Chorus, should be able to sing fairly.]

SCENES.

ACT I.

SCENE I. *Riverside, near a village.*
SCENE II. *The Mill.*
SCENE III. *Woods near Palace.*

ACT II.

SCENE I. *Same as last.*
SCENE II. *The Ferry.*
SCENE III. *HORN's Kitchen.*
SCENE IV. *Same as I. above.*

THE THREE GOLDEN HAIRS

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Riverside, near a village. Rushes down R. where Wat, with a large basket, is fishing, back turned. Distant bells are heard as the scene opens.*

Enter EELSKIN, L., carrying a palette.

Eel. Hum! We approach humanity. Yonder church-bells mark a village, surely, where we may break our fast. I will warn his Majesty — ah!

[As he turns, KING follows him in, L.
*He has a cloak, wideawake hat,
and sheaf of brushes.*

Sir, this is a village.

King. One of our hamlets—ha!

Eel. Where your Highness would, no doubt, prefer to be unknown.

King. Well?

Eel. You—we—must prepare our minds to dissemble.

King. Am I not incognito? You bore me, Eelskin!

Eel. Sir, it is not a matter of dress alone. Three times since we left the capital you have forgotten yourself and your chosen character.

King. Eelskin, for such as you, it is easy to

feign to be base: for us, impossible. My disguise as a Landscape-painter is well-nigh perfect, as is yours of my intimate friend. But would you expect me to adopt the vulgar manner of the Art schools, and to use their tongue? It is folly!

Eel. Quite so, Majesty. Equal folly that you, King Crow of Croatia, should feign friendship for such as I.

King. True. Yet recollect: it is for high purposes of State that I travel thus privily through my kingdom. I make a habit of it, once a year, that I may surprise secrets, the seeds of sedition and discontent. For this I have ordained the incognito, and at all costs,—to you, Eelskin—it must be preserved. Ahem! I am a Landscape-painter—

Eel. And I your intimate friend.

King. Be intimate: else, minion, your head will be the forfeit. What is that?

[*He catches sight of WAT's back.*

Eel. It looks like a villager.

King. One of our subjects. Speak to it.

Eel. What are you doing, fellow?

Wat. [*sulky*] Fishin'.

Eel. Have you caught anything?

[*Looks in basket.*

Wat. Naw. But a shall.

Eel. What village is that?

Wat. Ourn.

Eel. What are the bells for? A wedding?

Wat. A christening. There's a luck-child born.

Wish I was him, I do: I mought catch something.
[*Throws line.*] They do say, when he's fowerten, he'll marry the King's daughter.

King. What? Who says? Who ventures—

[*EELSKIN makes signs to him to be cautious.*

Eel. My good man, King Crow has not got a daughter.

Wat. Well, King Crow'll have to get un for to fit our luck-child. He, he! [Sniggers.] He's oun, Moll's and mine.

Eel. And who may you be?

Wat. I'm the Tinker.

King. [breaks out] Who dares foretell this? A Tinker's son, forsooth! We will rase this village to the ground. Ho, there, my Forest-guards—

[WAT turns slowly, gaping. Enter MOLL, L., with his dinner in a handkerchief.

Wat. What's wrong with un? Touched, is he? Why, here she is. [To MOLL.] Where's the lucky brat, Moll?

Moll. [nodding backward carelessly] Out yonder.

Wat. What, you left him on the grass?

Moll. His luck'll look after him, never fear.

[She takes dinner R., and lays it out on the grass. EELSKIN advances, simpering.

Eel. Do I see the proud mother of the lucky babe?

Moll. He's mine, yes. What's your business?

King. Woman, we would see this child.

Moll. [to EELSKIN] Who's that?

Eel. An intimate friend of mine, a Landscape-painter.

Moll. Well, tell him to keep his brushes in his mouth.

Wat. He, he, he! [KING fumes, L.] Did Parson hold un, Molly? What's his name?

Moll. Starling, I called him.

Wat. Well, I'm donnered! There's a Chrissen name to choose!

Eel. [insinuating] Rhymes to darling, anyhow.

Moll. [considering him] I don't mind letting you have a look at him, if that other will keep away. He's a fine boy, lusty. Hear him yell!

King. Curse him!

[Business. Music of song heard.

MOLL goes *L.* to fetch baby, which she puts in fishing-basket,

C. *WAT* protests in dumb-show. She insists, returns *R.* and sits

on grass with *WAT* at dinner, backs half-turned. *KING* and

EELSKIN confer down *L.* Enter *RIVER-FAIRIES* through rushes up

R., who dance quietly round baby in basket, singing.

Song, RIVER-FAIRIES.

Air—"Mowing the Barley."

O sisters neat, with noiseless feet
About this cradle treading,
Though poor and spare the christening-fare,
Superb shall be the wedding!

O sisters dear, seek far and near
A fortune for our darling,
A dear little bride from the King's own side,
To wed with our baby Starling.

O fortunate stars, in your silver cars,
Shine softly on our baby,
Who'll bless the life of the Tinker's wife,
And come to a kingdom, maybe.

[They dance off R. still unseen. MOLL gets up, bids WAT see to baby in dumb-show, bends over basket, and exit L. WAT looks from his fishing-rod to baby, perplexed.

Wat. Taking my basket! Says I've not caught anything — but a might! — Donnert the wives and the babies!

Eel. [to KING aside] Now is the time! I will make terms with this blockhead. No doubt, for a bottle of beer, he will sell us the child, and then — trust my cunning!

[He draws WAT out, up R. with elaborate action.

King. [alone] Poor Eelskin, he thinks himself very wise; but it would have been far simpler to rase the village. Its general tone, to our mind, is far from satisfactory! [Baby cries.] Cease, minion! [Baby cries.] Varlet, would you disobey me? [Strain of last music: Baby stops crying.] If our child should prove to be a girl — ha! We shall have all the strain of marrying her, later on. Now, what Prince could be high enough for a daughter of ours? There is the son of the King of Rookland. [Baby cries.] A plague on the pauper-brat, that will not let Royalty reflect in peace!

[Business. He strides to river and parts rushes; has an idea; steals back and crams lid on the basket; swings, and tosses it off the scene. A splash is heard — silence.

Now go and find a King's daughter to marry among the fishes! At least you will no longer disturb the State reveries of the King of Croatia!

[He returns to paint, C. Soft music of next cradle-song, while he stands frowning. Re-enter EELSKIN elaborately, from L.

Eel. My ruse has succeeded. My plans are prospering! My monarch's well-being is safe in my hands! The Tinker, in his cups, proved an easy prey. For a hundred crowns he will sell us the child — quite inexpensive.

King. [painting calmly] You may keep your crowns, and I will keep mine. I have put it already where it will not trouble us.

Eel. What? [Dumb-show] Sire, it is murder!

King. What, may I not dispose of a seditious subject as I wish? His brain, seething with purposes perilous to the common weal — his tongue wagging perpetually and fatal to our peace, are thus rendered innocuous. Ahem! This asp would have stung me, had I nourished him. I fling it from me [gesture] and I walk in peace.

Eel. With your Majesty's pardon, we had better walk hastily. Remember our disguises! I much fear you have forgotten your chosen character again. If you had allowed me to——

King. Tut, tut. I hate your buts and bargaining — the straight course is best. Still, if it pleases you, we will leave a purse of gold here, with the rustic's dinner. This music, Eelskin, [chinks purse] will amply compensate the common herd for a crying child!

[EELSKIN shakes head, doubtful. KING strikes an attitude, C. A woman's scream and scolding heard off L. His attitude alters, and he is before EELSKIN in slinking off R.C., where they hide. Re-enter

MOLL, holding WAT by the ear,
L.

Moll. Sold him, have you? Sold our luck for a pot of beer! You fuddling, muddling, maundering, good-for-nothing sot!

Wat. A hundred crowns! He offered me a hundred crowns!

Moll. And what is that, or his weight in gold either. I'll teach them to offer dirty money for a child of mine. Where's the baby?

Wat. [gapes about] I left him here.

Moll. They have stolen him! It's that ugly painter, I'll be bound, not the smart young spark who spoke to me.

[KING prepares to rush out: EELSKIN restrains him. MOLL hunts the rushes wildly. Meanwhile WAT goes to fishing things and finds the purse.]

Wat. Hey, hey, hey! What did a say? A fish worth catching has come our way! [He tosses her a coin.] Look at that!

Moll. Ugh! [She flings it in the river.] Who wants their gold? It is our luck that is gone, and my baby, too.

[She kneels C. looking R. to river, and sings.

Song, MOLL and RIVER-FAIRIES.

Air—"Colleen Oge Asthore."

Moll. Rushes of the river high,
Did you hear my baby cry?
Where is my lucky one? Where is my
ducky one?
Is my treasure gone for aye?

Spirits of the river brown,
 Depths where all the stars look down,
 Stars that were glistening over his christening,
 Do not let my baby drown!

Fairies. Rushes of the river-marge
 Bowed before a Royal Barge,
 Each little rush-a-by whispered a hush-a-by,
 Took your baby in their charge!
 [MOLL sinks head on hands, C., while
 WAT stands behind her, mouth open.
 [Curtain.]

SCENE II.—*The Mill, fourteen years later. Sacks about, and straw. STARLING discovered, dressed as Miller's Boy, and white with flour. He stands R.C. and counts on his fingers.*

Star. One, two, three, four — what comes after four? Five! — six, seven, eight, nine, ten — and three. What does that come to? I wish Father would let me have some teaching, but of course the mill leaves him no time. That river there is always at it, turning the wheel: and the wheel works the mill-stones, that grind the corn, which makes the flour for the miller's boy's back to carry — that's the worst of it! Ten years and three I have been here, since Father picked me out of the mill-dam. Ten years and three years [*fingers*] — what's that? They say I'm a good-grown lad for it, whatever it is. Well I never, there's a mouse! [Throws his cap.] Shoo! A mouse at my corn. [Horns heard without.] I wish the King and his

foresters would come and hunt our mice! *That* would do some good, instead of trampling the neighbour's cornfields!

[*Horn again.* Enter EELSKIN, L.,
grown fat and panting.

Eel. You there, boy, did the hare come this way?

Star. Unless he changed into a mouse, he didn't. What'd your hare be doing in our mill?

Eel. Your mill, sirrah? This is the King's hunting party. Wherever the King deigns to set his feet, he alone is lord and master. Must I tell you that? [*Pants.*] Where's the miller?

Star. He's gone to the town, left me in charge. We're busy — can't stop our work for King or Emperor neither. That river there leaves us no time.

Enter KING, L., much older and grimmer, while STARLING is speaking. EELSKIN falls back awed. STARLING turns and sees him.

King. Who is this infant rebel, this cockerel who crows so fine, in one of our Royal mills?

Star. 'Tis the miller's mill, sir: and I'm in charge.

King. Indeed? And who are you?

Star. The miller's boy.

King. Miller Max's son? You?

Star. Well, he's my father, and a good father too.

King. How old are you?

Star. Well, I'll tell you. Ten and three. You're a gentleman, and bound to know what that is.

Eel. Thirteen? Nonsense! You must be more than that.

Star. That's for you to say. Thirteen it may

be, but I'm not saying that it is. Ten and three is what I know it is.

King. [sitting down] Have this little malapert whipped. Do you know who I am, boy?

Star. His Majesty, King Crow, you are. And I'm the miller's boy, Starling.

[*KING starts.*

Eel. Starling? And thirteen years? Where do you come from?

Star. That river knows. You listen a bit and it'll tell you, likely.

[*He sulks, down R. Strain of river music, Scene I., heard pp. KING sits and gnaws fingers. Enter Miller's Wife R. much perturbed, wiping her hands on apron.*]

Miller's Wife. Who is it? Who is it? Starling, boy, why didn't you tell me? On a baking-morning too! They said it was the King himself who—— [*Business. She sees KING and curtseys low.*] Your Majesty!

Eel. Your poor abode is honoured, goodwife. His Highness is surprised, however, you leave such boys about.

Miller's Wife. Your worship, never heed the boy! He was born with a careless tongue, just as though he was any young lord, with a fortune in front of him, so we often say.

Eel. Such a tongue may hang well in a lord's mouth, dame, and much amiss in that of a saucy knave.

Miller's Wife. Truly, Sir. Yet for all his tongue, he is a dear good boy, and trustworthy as twice his age, though he has had no schooling.

King. I'll take him, and school him!

Miller's Wife. [eagerly] Will your Majesty?

That's what I always wanted! Why the poor child barely knows his numbers; yet so useful to us, strong and handy, there's no sparing him.

[KING and EELSKIN consult apart L.C.
a moment.]

Eel. [politely] Dame, is this youth we saw your only son?

Miller's Wife. [confidential] Well, now, to speak truth to your Honours — Starling, boy, go see to the pies, they're burning. [Exit STARLING down R.] To speak truth to your nobleness, he's not our only son, since he's not our son at all. My man Max picked him out of the mill-dam, come Midsummer fourteen years agone. He was no age then, but a swaddled babby. [She wipes her eyes.] I had buried my own pretty a week before, I had; and my man says to me, "Wife," he says, "this is Providence purely." [Sobs.] And I didn't at all like his looks at first —

Eel. What, was he ailing —

Miller's Wife. Not he, my lord. He was merry and dry, for all he was sailing in a basket.

King. Curse him.

Miller's Wife. He was the bonniest ever seen — but my own precious poppet was bonnier. He had a way with him as —

Eel. Ay, but tell us of this one. I suppose he was some pauper's trash, discarded.

Miller's Wife. [eagerly] Not he, sir! He's no trash, he's high-blooded, brave as a hawk, easy, perhaps, to the likes of you, but civil and kind to the poorest. My Max says often — "I'll lay he'll take to the highest place." He's thought of sending him to the King's city, down the river; but the boy would not leave us. Not for all his will to see the world, he would not.

[KING paces about brooding. Re-enter STARLING down R., and whispers to Miller's Wife.

What, baked already? And good pies? Well, I'll say for you, you have the lucky fingers. [They embrace. KING turns, standing L.C.]

King. Hearken, goodwife. Will you spare this lad to us for a day or two, to carry a letter for me to the Queen? Her Majesty can best judge whether, as a page, he is worth the schooling. [To STARLING.] But I warn him, when he comes to court, to let his tongue hang less loosely. They know how to treat spoiled schoolboys there.

Miller's Wife. Pardon, your Majesty, but spoiled he is not. We never spoiled him. My man Max, he said—

King. A murrain on your man Max! If Max the miller knew his place, he would be here to greet me. I like not this slinking from my countenance. It bodes no good.

Star. How should the miller know which way your hare would run?

Miller's Wife. Whisht, my dearie-dear!

Star. Well, he can let my father alone.

King. [furious] He is no father of yours, you base-born son of a travelling Tinker —

Eel. [anxious] Sir, sir, for heaven's sake — [Whispers.]

Star. I speak no evil of his father. His father was the best king Croatia ever had.

Eel. The best, sirrah?

Star. [pensive] The best — at present.

[Faint river-music heard. KING makes a desperate gesture, clutches hair. Then he writes a letter, rapidly, up L.]

Miller's Wife. Whisht, my dearie, you would not blame a poor gentleman, king or no, that he has no son to succeed him. He has the prettiest little girl that ever—

King. [advancing] Peace, woman. [To STARLING.] Take this to her Majesty the Queen, direct.

Star. When shall I be back?

Miller's Wife. [aside] That will be in the King's good time, dearie. There's enough questions: the grand folk don't care for that. Answers is all they want.

Star. Do they want an answer to this, then?

King. [evasive] There may be no answer.

Star. But if there be, where shall I bring it? [He fixes KING.] Where shall I find the King?

Eel. [as KING is disturbed] The King, boy, is always to be found. [He makes signs to MILLER'S WIFE to take STARLING away.]

Star. [as she draws him off] I wish I knew what was in it.

Eel. If you dare to tamper—

Miller's Wife. He's safe, my lord: he can't read.

[*Exeunt STARLING and MILLER'S WIFE at R.*]

King. [aside] Ah, his eyes! [To EELSKIN.] What did he mean about finding me, Eelskin? He will never find me, once that letter is in the Queen's hands! My fair Queen is to be trusted!

Eel. The Queen is merciful, sir: he is a pretty lad.

King. Merciful? She is obedient! There is no request in that missive—directions merely. There is my will!

Eel. J—just so. Majesty. There he goes,

riding a farm-horse. [*Looks off R.*] He loses no time. He would have made a smart young free-lance for the King's Forest-guard.

King. [grim] Know you how I love free-lances, free tongues, free thoughts, in the forest or elsewhere? Know you what becomes of such? They swing *free* enough, I warrant!

Eel. You mean—

King. Hist! I feel better, now he is fairly gone. Let us hunt the hare.

[*Curtain.*]

SCENE III.—*Woods near the Palace. Light low, but increases during scene, showing a dummy body hanging on a tree up L. STARLING discovered sleeping on the ground, R.C. Two OUTLAWS seated L. in consultation.*

1st Out. The light grows.

2nd Out. Know you where we are?

1st Out. Well enough. These are the grounds of the Queen's Forest-lodge, and yonder is the Palace. [*Points L. and looks round at STARLING.*] We must leave the young miller now to his journey.

2nd Out. Ay, it would hardly do for you and me to face the King's Forest-guards, still less beard Queen Wimple's courtiers. When I think how many of the fat fools we have robbed, brother, since first we took to the woods!

1st Out. Ha, ha! I would we could waylay his Highness himself: we would tell him some things he will never learn, even on his prying tours. How he is loved! Why, he is a bye-word through the country, the black King Crow. Hist — see the fruit of the tree yonder. [*Points.*] That is his work.

2nd Out. Were it not for the Queen and her pretty daughter—

1st Out. Ay, but they say Crow will marry the girl to the King of Rookland, a prince as black as himself. It will be an evil day for the country when *that* comes to pass.

2nd Out. Well, good kings or bad kings, it makes small difference to us. We are Fortune's followers, and much good our mistress does us! What about this lad, now?

1st Out. Oh, let him be.

2nd Out. He's unarmed, he told us.

1st Out. I dare say.

2nd Out. All very well! We have shown him his way, since he asked us, beguiled us with his tripping tongue. Are we to have nothing for our trouble?

1st Out. He's a poor miller's lad, flour in his pockets—what could we make of him? Let him be.

2nd Out. Fat millers have more than flour in their pouches, these times! That Max he calls father is a wealthy one. How do you know he mayn't have deceived us, as to his errand?

1st Out. Pish, he couldn't deceive a mouse! If he were coming from the town, now, he might be worth ferreting. As it is, he is as poor as we are: nothing even on his little bones to pick.

[*STARLING stirs, putting a hand to his breast.*

2nd Out. What's he holding?

1st Out. He told us. A packet for the Queen.

2nd Out. That's worth money, you'd say. No harm in looking at it, anyhow.

[*1ST OUTLAW shrugs. 2ND OUTLAW rises, slips letter out of STARLING'S*

*hand and opens it, standing up
R. by the sleeper. He reads, and
whistles.*

1st Out. Hush! What's the matter? [He also rises, and leans to look as 2ND OUTLAW comes down L. to him.] The Royal Seal! [He takes it and reads.] "Let the bearer of this be flogged, strangled, and strung up, such that all may be over by our return. Signed, Crow of Croatia." Ha! Ha! King Crow at his best! They say well, in the country, that he feeds on carrion. [They laugh, and look at one another.] Well, he couldn't have been worse off in our hands, brother. What do you say?

2nd Out. Let's keep, and make a Free Huntsman of him. He'd soon take to our trade.

1st Out. Wait; I have a better idea. Leave it to me. [He ponders, takes a quill-pen from his cap, and writes on the scroll.] How is that?

2nd Out. [looking] Ha! Ha! Ha! [Both laugh, and 2ND OUTLAW reads.] "Let the bearer of this be dusted, dressed, and wedded to our daughter, so that all may be over by our return. Signed, Crow of Croatia." Ho! ho! ho! Brother, you have a pretty wit. That will serve the Croaker-King well for his cruelty, and what is more, save the country from another carrion-king.

1st Out. And Princess Pearl from an ugly husband.

[They laugh. STARLING stirs, moves, claps a hand to his breast, and sits up.

Star. My letter! Where is my letter?

1st Out. Here it is. A little gust of wind woke you, which blew it in our direction. A breeze often comes at dawn.

Star. [rising, and stowing the letter] Dawn, is it? Know you where we are?

1st Out. Very well. We are in the Queen's forest-grounds, and that way lies the Palace.

Star. The Palace, so soon? How short the road has seemed, since I lost myself and lamed my horse! [Sees body on tree and draws back.] What is that?

2nd Out. A common ornament of the woods, in good King Crow's domain. We might well be in like case, if he met us.

Star. You? Then tarry not, but leave me. [Holds out hand.] You have come far from home, to serve me.

2nd Out. Home? We have no home. We are but poor Free-huntsmen.

Star. If I were king, I'd ask no better to defend me.

1st Out. [aside] Who is this child?

2nd Out. Luck's child, he calls himself.

1st Out. Luck's child! Well, we have prodded lazy Luck for him, eh, brother? [To STARLING.] Farewell.

[*Exeunt OUTLAWS, with salutes.*

Enter PEARL, R., picking flowers.

Princess. Good morning, country-boy. What funny men! Who are they?

Star. [saluting] Why, Miss, they call themselves Free-huntsmen.

Princess. [shocked] Free-huntsmen? Oh, but that is very naughty indeed! I am afraid, if my father knew, he would have them shot and strung upon the trees.

Star. [recognizing her] I have no doubt he would. [Aside.] It must be the Princess!

Princess. [picking a flower] There are no free-huntsmen in our land; they are all my father's. How did you come in their company, you dusty boy?

Star. I was lost; and wandered all night seeking the path till I found them, Princess.

Princess. Do you know who I am?

Star. I think I do: I hope so. Because if you are who I think you are, I have a letter for your mother the Queen.

Princess. A letter? That is Papa's black seal. [She calls L.] Mamma — oh, Mamma! Here is a boy come from the King with a letter. [Enter QUEEN WIMPLE and DUCHESS ANN, from L.] He is terribly dusty, but that is because he has been travelling all night, and lost the path, and two ever-such-funny free-men showed him the way to us. Fancy!

Queen. My dearest Pearl, what a mouthful of chatter! He seems a very ordinary young peasant; and if he has made haste, that is because your father sent him.

Princess. Yes. It is so funny everybody does what Papa says, just as fast as they can!

Queen. Where is your missive, boy? [STARLING hands it, dusting it first.] You are dusty, indeed!

Star. It is flour, Madam; in my pockets. I work in a mill.

Princess. A mill — how lovely! What is it like? [They talk in whispers together down R. QUEEN walks aside L., passing the letter to the DUCHESS, a hand to her breast.]

Queen. Read it to me, pray, my dearest Ann! A special message from Crow makes me so nervous. It is nearly always some one to be beaten

or exiled, or assassinated in his absence. People will soon hate me as much as—— I mean, I shall soon be hated as though I were a cruel Empress, not an obedient wife!

Duchess. [reads] “Let the bearer of this be dusted, dressed, and wedded to our daughter, such that all may be over by our return.”

Queen. Impossible! You rave, my good Ann! So kind and comical — that is never my Crow’s hand! Look again.

Duchess. Madam, that is how it stands. There is a former message, all but erased; something about flogging and strangling, it seems to be.

Queen. [horrified] Never! Poor little thing! But that sounds much more like my dear husband. Which am I to believe?

Duchess. Madam, the first read fairly, the second is all but blackened out.

Queen. A white message and a black message; one that I favour, and one that I believe! Which then shall I follow? It is plain to me, Ann, since my Pearl has taken to him, that this peasant boy is a king’s son in disguise, and I should love to dust and dress him up, according to the fair command! But I feel sure my Crow never meant anything so amusing, for all of us; the black one is so much more the colour of his mind. My sweetest Ann, do help me!

Duchess. Madam, you might consult the Court.

Queen. [bitterly] What does the Court care whether I maltreat a messenger or marry him to my daughter? Either would make a show, and an hour’s talk! . . . Come hither, young man. Know you the contents of this packet?

Star. Madam, I cannot read.

Princess. Not read, Starling? I will teach you.

Duchess. [aside to QUEEN] Then he cannot write either; thus he cannot be the forger.

Queen. Very true, but I knew it: this is a nice boy. Now, sir, by the King's orders, and under his seal, I am to bid you welcome, and offer you my daughter's hand.

Princess. Mother!

Queen. What think you of it?

Star. Madam, I think it most unlike the King.

Queen. [to DUCHESS ANN, aside] You see, he is a clever boy too: he agrees with me. [To STARLING.] You refuse, then?

Star. What happens if I refuse? [QUEEN points to body on tree; he is troubled.] I would take no favour from one who insulted my father.

Duchess. Hush, child! The King may insult anybody.

Queen. Would you take nothing from us?

Princess. Or from me?

[Business. STARLING looks at both of them, then at the corpse, shaking his head. DUCHESS ANN hands him the letter, and he shakes his head again. QUEEN and PRINCESS interlaced go slowly up L. towards exit. PRINCESS turns and beckons to him, smiling.

Star. What's in writing! 'Tis a strange art: more of a puzzle-wit even than the tens and threes!

[He follows them slowly, head down, holding the letter.

[Curtain.]

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Same as last. Enter EELSKIN, R., puffing in the clutches of two OUTLAWS.*

Eel. But, sirs, I assure you, I have nothing of worth upon me. I am but the King's poor huntsman, his herald today.

1st Out. Crow follows you?

Eel. Oh, sir, speak of his Graciousness with more respect! But bethink you, he must not arrive, and the Palace, the menials, unwarned, that were—[gesture].

1st Out. Ah! [Imitates gesture.] A shock to them indeed, in the midst of the betrothal festivities!

Eel. Say you so? Has the Princess accepted the King of Rookland, her pressing suitor?

1st Out. Her hand is promised, and she will be affianced today. The City down there is mad with merriment, or so the country rumour goes.

Eel. Ha! They had best not be too merry, lest the King—

1st Out. It is true. Out of the shadow of the Crow's wing, those about the Princess grow young again. Such simple happiness should not be permitted: it is perilous.

Eel. Do you think so? Pray then, take my gold chain, take anything, and let me go. Bethink you, I carry the Royal Command!

[He turns to 2ND OUTLAW.

2nd Out. [clasping him closer] Nay, tarry a little. You are the second messenger, royally charged, we have — accompanied lately.

Eel. Eh? — Ay, ay! [*Chuckles.*] A young lad, was it not? A pretty popinjay, something dusty in the plumage. Canst tell me how he prospered?

1st Out. Methinks the Queen exalted him. [*EELSKIN chuckles.*] Raised him high. [*Points.*]

Eel. [*gaping*] Ah, ah! Is it indeed he who hangs yonder? Tell me, you saw him die? [*Nods and pantomime from both OUTLAWS.*] Ah, if you had seen him, not so long since, bearding his betters! So young and fresh and fearless! Who would think—— [*Shakes his head at dummy.*] This will be merry news for my master—and the wedding too! But let me go, sirs, and I warrant you both a free pardon, on the strength of this.

2nd Out. [*clasping him closer*] Wait, I hear the music approaching. Come this way and attend.

[*They retreat down R. Enter Chorus, L., dancing in procession.*

Song and Dance.

Air—“Come, Lasses and Lads.”

O Prentices all, take leave of your thrall,
And toss your tools away;

O lads come rollick and lasses frolic,
To greet this holiday.

Our lady and only joy

Will mate with the Miller’s boy,
So trip it, trip it, trip it, on this bridal day.

[*OUTLAWS suddenly drop EELSKIN
and join in with crowd.*

O join in the cause you merry outlaws
 Who own no master or lord;
 The cat's away, and the mice will play
 All over the greenwood sward.

So *this* for the tyrant's whim!
 And *this* for our fear of him!

We will flout him, scout him, do without him,
 that is his fair reward!

[*Flouting chorus repeated with hoots and whistles.* EELSKIN stands dumb with horror. Enter KING CROW and joins him. String of dancers lead off, hands over lips.

King. What is this? Who mentioned a Miller's boy?

Eel. Sir, it is an uprising, surely. Hark to the noise from the town!

King. It is these cursed Free-huntsmen! Zounds, I will hang them all: there are trees enough. What, more?

[*Music of a Wedding March.* Enter procession with green boughs, L., PEARL and STARLING leading. In the middle, KING strides out, clattering his sword in scabbard. Shrieks, confusion. Music stops: men retire up stage. Girls go to PEARL, L.C. QUEEN comes C. STARLING stands down L., alone.

King. Hold, minions! I order this folly to cease! Daughter, wife, are you mad? Who is that interloper?

Queen. Sir, good lord, it is he whom you sent us: our son-in-law, Prince Starling.

King. I send? Here is trickery and a deep-

laid plot. Ho, servitors! Ho, my Forest-guard! Seize that common pretender!

[*Guards hang back; girls cluster about PEARL, who falls on her knees.*

Princess. Papa, dear Papa! But you asked us to be kind to him!

Queen. Remember your own signature, sir. We follow but your written will.

King. Kind to him? My will? Madam, methinks my state in absence is but carelessly represented! I sent no order as to marriage, betrothal, or such gewgaws! I ordained that — which will now be his fate. [*Screams.*] As for you—

Queen. Sir, you forget yourself. Imprison me if you like, but look first upon this letter, which you sent me by this gentleman's hands.

King. He is no gentleman.

Queen. Merely gentle. [*With meaning.*] And, as it seems, widely beloved.

King. What is that to me? The girl is promised to the King of Rookland.

Princess. I do not like a King Rook, Papa. He is expensive.

King. Expensive?

Princess. Rooks are, you know. Now, Starling is Luck's child — aren't you?

[*To STARLING, who scratches head.*

King. Much his luck has done for him, standing there!

Princess. But it might! He would earn money for me — for you as well. His foster-father is rich; they say the water of the mill-dam, every sunset, turns to gold. Slay him and you slay his luck, for all of us. Why not use it instead?

King. [*To EELSKIN*] On my beard, the wench

speaks sense! Luck, left in prison, wastes away.
On the gallows it —

Eel. Breaks the rope.

King. Not my rope. Hearken, Eelskin: I hate, but I will not hang him yet. I have a plan by which, with all appearance of mercy, I may yet sate my revenge. [To STARLING.] Approach, young man. Heard you ever of Horn, the Black Wizard of the Nether Cave?

Star. Most men alive have heard of him.

King. And what of men dead?

Star. Dead men know him also. He is a King of Shades.

King. Fear you a ghostly kingdom?

Star. I fear nothing, so the mission has sense.

King. Of that you shall judge. I have a wish, before I consent to your union with my daughter there, for the Three Golden Hairs from the Black King's head.

Star. Does your Majesty still follow hares? It was so I first met you.

King. Hairs from a ghostly head are harder to catch. [Growls from crowd.]

A Prentice. Refuse, refuse, sir! Curse the tyrant! He would slay you and slay your soul.

[Thunder rolls; all are terrified.

PEARL weeps, head in her mother's skirt, L.C.

Queen. Is this your mercy, sir?

Star. I will do it.

A Forester. Beware!

[Thunder again, and a flash.

Star. But tell me how to go.

King. [jeering] How to go? Surely that is popular knowledge. [Points.] Ask your friends.

[Tableau. KING and EELSKIN down

R., Queen and Princess L.C., STARLING down L. Chorus emerges in procession C., each section singing in confidence with gestures as they wait near STARLING.

Song and Chorus.

Air—“Shule Agra.”

Prentices.

You seek the river at the mill,
And follow all its windings till
It chokes with rushes near a hill.

[*Thunder.*]

Ah woe, be warned, the quest is not for you!

Girls.

The lake is dark, the lake is wide,
It plunges in the mountain-side,
A kingdom where the ghosts abide.

[*Thunder.*]

Ah woe, be warned, the quest is not for you!

Chorus.

Woe, be warned, you mortal boy!
Where, oh where is all our joy?
Storm in skies that were so blue,
Ah woe, be warned, the quest is not for you!

Foresters.

The Ferryman will steer his prow
To shores where demons mop and mow,
And Horn goes hunting such as thou.

[*Thunder.*]

Ah stay, our friend, the quest is not for you!

Chorus.

Woe, be warned of ghost and elf,
Nor risk thy soul for earthly pelf,
But let King Crow go down himself!

Ah stay, our friend, the quest is not for you!

Star. The risk is fearful! [He cogitates, looks at PEARL, who kneels motionless, face hidden.] But I accept it! Farewell, Princess, until I come again.

[He kisses her hand, and runs out L.
CROW stands in triumph C.]

[Curtain.]

SCENE II.—Rushes, etc., again, withered flowers, etc. Half light, with occasional flashes and rumbles. Down L. a post with bell marked “Ferry.” Enter STARLING, R. with two BURGOMASTERS, FAT and THIN.

Thin Burg. [solemn] Young man, we have brought you thus far, by the river-track. There is your ferry, if you are still headstrong. You can hardly miss the way.

Star. Do your honours not come with me?

Fat Burg. [slapping his paunch] Do I look like it? We do not join the ghosts as yet.

[Rumble.]

Thin Burg. Methinks it grows darkish. I never liked th—thunder.

Star. Well, I thank you for your escort. Is there anything I can do for you across there?

[Nods L.]

Fat Burg. He talks as though he were going to the next town! Nay, my lad, do not mention me that side, I pray you. Not that I believe in spirits. [STARLING takes leave, and moves to bell.] Yet stay! Wizards may always be of practical use. I have a little problem, which I will relate.

[*He recites.*

Not far hence, in my native town
 There is a fountain of high renown.
 It runs water on week days, on Sundays beer,
 Which makes it, you take me, exceedingly dear.
 Not long since, it ceased to bubble,
 And no one can tell us the cause of the trouble.
 Ah, how they miss it, the poor good souls,
 Especially during their Sunday strolls!
 It has been flowing for fifty summers,
 And never once has it wanted plumbers,
 But now, whoe'er shall the cause unfold,
 Will receive two asses laden with gold.

[*To STARLING.*] If you and King Horn grow sociable, he might find a hint to help us, eh?

Thin Burg. I like your fashion of presuming on the young man's civility! For myself, I have no favour to ask: merely a story to tell.

[*He recites.*

Not far hence, sir — the names you'll pardon —
 Is a village called (*wink*) and a garden.
 The garden belongs to my daughter-in-law,
 And has the best apple tree ever you saw.
 Apples of gold — red gold — yes, really!
 The dear girl sent me a basket yearly.
 Well, last spring, ere the tree was cropped,
 The whole of its growth was suddenly stopped!

I dug and I pruned and I panted free,
 But never a fruit on that rascally tree!
 To anyone who should explain its pranks
 I'd willingly offer my — very best thanks.

Fat Burg. Beggarly miser!

Star. Gentlemen, your problems are knotty indeed; but be sure I will do what I can for both.

Fat Burg. [aside] I know which of us he will really regard! A well-placed generosity always pays, if only that poor-blooded skinflint knew. [To STARLING.] Farewell, my friend. Here is a present of a fat ham to speed you on your journey. Do you come, sir?

Thin Burg. [aside] I should like to have a look at this Ferryman they talk of; that is, if the boy really ventures to ring the bell. He may be fooling us. None ever yet dared ring it of their own accord.

Fat Burg. [shuddering] That comes soon enough in any case. Dear me, how dark it grows!

[Business. STARLING strides to bell and tinkles it three times. Thunder. Exit FAT BURGOMASTER hurriedly. Flash. Enter FAG the Ferryman L. Exit THIN BURGOMASTER with a howl. FAG sings gratingly.]

Song, with Action.

Air—“There were Three Ravens.”

There were three little men came to the brink
 (Down-a-down, hey down),
 The wave rolled by as black as ink
 (With a down),

And one of them said to the twain,
 "Oh, let us helter-skelter home again"
 (With a down, derry down).

There were two little men looked at the bell
 (Down, etc.),
 Sayin' — "That will call queer things from 'ell'"
 (With a down),
 And one of them said to the ither,
 "I don't like a-goin' where I don't know whither"
 (With a down, etc.).

There was one little man left on the shore,
 My master Horn had hoped for more,
 But master he will like this chappie,
 He's fat and wholesome-like and young and sappy
 (With a down, etc.).

[*Finish in a groan.*

Star. Thank you, master. Any merry welcome does for me. How's work going?

Fag. You're the first we've had down-away this ten years.

Star. Really? And who was last?

Fag. Poor picking: he was seventy-two. Now, you're a dainty little chicken. What's your name?

Star. Starling. What's yours?

Song, with action — FAG.

Air—“Dame, get up and bake your pies.”

Fag the Ferryman am I
 (Ferryman I, Ferryman I),
 None can tell me how or why;
 I'm sick of it years ago, sir!
 [*Jerks thumb to and fro.*

Folks they go and folks they come,
Only old Fag will ne'er get home
A-ferryng to and fro, sir.

Find the secret to set me free,
I'll thank you *not* on my bended knee,
There's rheumatiz in the joint, sir.

Folks they go and folks they come,
Only old Fag will ne'er get home
As Fortune she doth appoint, sir.

Fag. I can think this way and I can think that way [*Thumbs as before*], but no other way can I think. Just talkin' to you here, because I'm neither going nor coming, makes me feel queerish. As for going this way or that way [*Thumbs*] I'd go mad on the spot surely.

[*Sings*] Only old Fag'll ne'er get home
As Fortune she doth appoint, sir.

Star. I don't believe she appoints it. I'm a child of Fortune, and should know.

Fag. You Fortune's son, sir? And what, if it beant awk'ard askin', be you adoing here?

Star. I seek three Golden Hairs from the Giant's head. [*Thunder.*]

Fag. [*anxious*] Whist, whisht! Why, there's none knows he has them, unless his own mother; and don't you go asking she.

Star. I never heard of a mother. Where does she live?

Fag. [*whispers*] Hedda's his mother; she keeps his house. I'd not go near her, but there! Mothers is mothers. There might be a chanst.

Star. Is she fond of him?

Fag. Ay, truly, and proud. She sits combing out his hair.

Star. I'll try it. Is there any present I could take her?

Fag. Take her yourself; there's nothing old wives like better than a brisk young lad. [*Doubtful.*] Happen she might like you for the pot, if so be she's not been marketing —

Star. I have a fat ham here — how is that?

Fag. All very well, but where's *my* pay?

Star. [*troubled*] Will you trust me till I come back?

Fag. Till you come back! Till you come back, says you! Why, none ever did come back!

Star. Well, I will come back, and look — I will bring you an answer to your question.

Fag. What question?

Star. The one you asked — how to get clear of this ferry-boat.

Fag. You'll answer that? You'll answer that? [*Depressed.*] But Lordy-save-us, you'll be in the pot by that time; why, bless my buttons, King Horn he will be eating Starling-soup.

Star. [*aside*] It's hard to be cheerful with this old gentleman. Perhaps it comes of keeping him on the bank. Once plying, he'll be merrier. [*To FAG.*] Come now, to your trade.

Fag [*grumbling*] I like that, unpaid. [*As STARLING goes L. he hurries after.*] Don't you touch that tiller, now, or it'll go to the bottom sure-ly. There are but two ways I can go, this way and that way [*Thumbs*], but I can do that. Ay, I can do that.

• [Exeunt. Curtain.]

SCENE III.—*The Black King's kitchen.* HEDDA discovered making soup, L.C., in a very large pot. She tastes it.

Hedda. Hum! Methinks it lacks flavour again, and Horn will chide me. Yet you *would* say enough had gone into the pot to make it tasty! Let me see: [Counts on fingers] there's the hedgehog and the rattlesnake, a bullock-skin with hoofs and horns—that should have a good beefy flavour; nine honeycombs with the bees in them, two pairs of old boots, and some nice red toadstools. Yet it tastes but so-so. O, for a nice young goat or buck from the other side! Still better a plump young lad, some naughty truant, the despair of his masters. Horn is bound to like naughty-boy best. Who is this?

Enter STARLING, R.

Star. Good-day, Mother.

Hedda. [aside] Mother! To me!

Star. May I ask whose house this is? And if I can have a bite and sup?

Hedda. This, hardy stranger, is the house of Horn.

Star. Well, that is good hearing, for it is Horn I seek.

Hedda. Horn is hunting. Begone, rash mortal, lest he return too soon.

Star. I am weary. [He sits down, R.] How odd your soup smells. What is it made of?

Hedda. A world of good things, as befits a Ghost-King's table. [She fishes out an old boot.] You see? Ah, that there were a leg inside it!

Star. [aside] This is a strange house. I suppose this is the Wizardress.

Hedda. [aside] He is a pretty, sonsy boy.

Alas, I am aware of feminine weakness! [To STARLING.] Tell me your business.

Star. I seek three Golden Hairs from the Ghost-King's head.

Hedda. What?

Star. It is little to ask, from the wonderful head of hair I hear the Giant possesses.

Hedda. [softened] It is true my son has the most wonderful hair. As a child his hair was of purest gold; but it has darkened with age, and now but three of the Golden Hairs remain. You would not deprive me, his mother, of my earliest memories? [She looks into pot and fishes out a fur rug, which she drops with a sigh, and tastes it.] The flavour grows, I think.

Star. [offering ham] Would this improve matters?

Hedda. The very thing. [Sniffs it.] Pig! Nothing more resembles fat burgomaster, my dear son's favorite food.

Star. Indeed! [Aside.] It is as well the donor of the pork turned back! [Blare without. He starts.] What is that?

Hedda. It is Horn, returning! Hide, child, beneath my bonnet, if you would save your skin! For the sake of that ham-bone, Hedda will do her best to help you.

Star. [sitting calmly warming his hands] There is more I must know first.

[Tramping heard.]

Hedda. Hide, hide!

Star. I must know —

Hedda. What, what?

Star. First, what caused the fountain, the pride of the town, to cease flowing.

Hedda. Alas! How can I tell?

Star. Next, what caused the tree of the golden apples to cease growing.

Hedda. Spare me! He will slay me too!

Star. Last, what keeps the Ferryman for ever going, to-and-frowning —

Hedda. There is no knowing, no knowing, no knowing! Begone, young cockerel, and cease crowing. Else, on your bended knee, you'll crow in another key!

[*STARLING* hides under her bonnet.

Enter HORN, L.

Horn. Aha! Ahum! Fee, fi, fo, fum! If you asked me, I'd say somebody's come.

Hedda. [shaking head] A pig for the pot, to make my brew hot. Sit down and see if you like it or not.

[*HORN* seeks about, and sits down growling to supper.

Horn. All very pretty: still I'm hung, but I sniffed somebody young. [Tastes.] This has a fat-Aldermanic flavour.

Hedda. Which is better, any day, than a slim young shaver.

Horn. Not so. Bad boy's my favourite food. He's never so dainty if he is good. [Jumps up.] I'll warrant bad boy has crossed this floor. I never smelt impudence so strong before!

Hedda. You have eaten, my darling, now sleep upon it.

Horn [lies at her feet] What are you doing without your bonnet?

Hedda. The kitchen was hot, and I needed air. Sleep, little lamb, while I comb your hair.

[*HORN* sleeps. She combs and sings.

Song—HEDDA.

Air—“Cock-a-doodle-doo”

Oh sleep, my Horn so fair.
 Your mammy combs your hair.
 The fountain-feast its flow has ceased
 But why we're not aware.

But why we're not aware,
 But why we're not aware,
 She fain would know of the fountain flow
 And plucks the first Gold Hair!

[*She plucks hair. HORN starts awake, hand to head.*

Horn. Ods-bodikins! What are you about?

Hedda. Forgive me. I had so strange a dream
 that I seized your hair. I dreamt that the fountain
 in the market-place, the pride of the town,
 had ceased flowing.

Horn. Ha, ha! That takes some knowing.
 Under a stone of the fountain squats a squinting
 toad. Slay it, and it will flow as it always flowed.

Hedda. To be sure. Sleep again, my son.

[*Sings.*

O sleep, my Horn so fair.
 Your mammy combs your hair.
 The wealth of the tree has ceased to be,
 And why we're not aware.

But why we're not aware,
 But why we're not aware,
 She fain would hear why the tree's so queer
 And plucks the next Gold Hair!

Horn. Flinders and Cinders! What are you about?

Hedda. Be merciful—I had so strange a dream. I dreamt that the tree of the golden apples had ceased growing.

Horn. Ha! Ha! That takes some knowing. A mouse sits nibbling at the good tree's root. Slay it, and the branches will again bear fruit.

Hedda. I knew it! [Sings.

O sleep, my Horn so fair.
Your mammy combs your hair.
She fain would ask of the Ferryman's task
And why he must be there.

But O, she does not dare,
But O, she does not dare,
She fain would enquire of the Ferryman's hire,
And plucks the last Gold Hair!

[*Thunder.* She holds up hairs. HORN wakes raging.

Horn. Can a man never sleep in peace, but you will be at him with your pulling and pricking and yowling lullabies? I will put you in the pot, and leave you there to bubble at your ease!

[Seizes her by the hair.

Hedda. O mercy, mercy, it was but a frightful dream! Listen! I dreamt I myself was that Ferryman of ours, condemned for ever to ply on a lonely lake. It seemed so wretched a pass that I woke and seized you —

Horn. A wretched pass? A silly ass! Fag has only to give the tiller into the hands of the first passenger who will take it; and the other would be forced to ferry for ever in his place, while he went free as air. Now, a truce to your

combing. Let me alone: I would sleep in peace. If you do not — the pot!

[She trembles. He falls asleep on floor, head to audience, knees up.
STARLING emerges from bonnet,
as HEDDA bends to look at HORN.

Hedda. My poor pretty! Did his mammy take his hairs? Ah, how sweet he used to look lying in his cradle: even lovelier than at present. *[To STARLING.]* There are your hairs, a fond mother's last gift. For when he finds they are gone, tomorrow, he will surely boil me. *[Weeps.]*

Star. Come with me, Mother. Escape while you can.

Hedda. *[shakes head]* No hope, no hope.

Demons. *[behind]* No hope, no hope, no hope, for ever-more!

Star. What's that?

Enter Chorus as imps, and dance about HORN.

Song—IMPS.

Air—“The Two Magicians.”

O we are imps and goblins, as black as any ink,
 And you're a silly mortal, so prancing, proud and
 pink.

[All.]

No hope, no hope, no hope, no hope for ever-more.

O is that your silly song?
 We never would change our demonhood
 That we have kept so long,
 We'd rather dance despairing, but dance with a
 will

With our good fellows underground,
Than be such a silly-white, lily-white

Ad.lib. Crusty, dusty,
Glowery, floury, Mortal Boy,
A dusty Miller-boy!

[Repeat tune for dance, and exeunt,
putting out tongues.

Star. [shakes head] This is a very strange
house. I think I should be well out of it. Fare-
well, Mother.

[Curtain.]

SCENE IV.—Same as Act I., Scene I. Pearl dis-
covered sleeping on ground, R.C. Enter
STARLING with flowers, R. He advances and
kisses her. She wakes.

Princess. Starling! Is it really you? Well, I
am glad. How nice you look—but I liked you
better in your flour.

Star. It is you that will be flowery now, Prin-
cess. [He crowns her.] There! What a pretty
dress you have on.

Princess. It's my ball dress. You see, I was
to be married to the King of Rookland tomorrow
—I mean today.

Star. What are you doing here, then?

Princess. Well, we had such a very long ball,
and I grew so tired dancing with that Rook that
I ran away early this morning. And then I was
afraid to go back, so I slept here. [Weeps.] And
now they will never, never let me marry you in-
stead. The Rook-king is so very rich.

Star. Is that all? I have two asses laden with
gold.

Princess. Have you? How did you get them?

Star. A token of gratitude from a grateful burgomaster.

Princess. A burgomaster, and grateful? But how much *is* two asses'-ful? For Papa will ask.

Star. Enough to keep us very comfortable, and our mothers too.

Princess. [sighing] I fear Papa does not want me comfortable: he wants me grand. However, go to your asses and wait. I hear his horn.

Exit STARLING, R. Enter KING CROW and DUCHESS ANN, L.

Duchess. What, our Princess? And alone? What is that?

[Cheering heard, R. She runs to see.

King. Daughter, what make you here?

Princess. Oh, Papa dear, I had a lovely dream. I thought Starling had come home again, with two asses laden with solid gold!

King. What, that vulgar pretender? Let me not hear his name!

Duchess [re-entering] It is he! It is he!

King. Who?

Duchess. Luck's child. The miller without his flour.

King. Never; not that brat again! No matter, this time I have him by the neck. What are asses and gold to me? I will claim my three Hairs at his hand!

Duchess. He looks a very Prince: the people are crowding about him. He asks for the Princess.

King. He shall not have her! To the house, girl! What, you disobey?

[He draws his sword. PRINCESS shrieks.

STARLING rushes on scene and clasps her, holding up his hand.

Star. The Hairs, the Hairs!

[*Thunder, lightning.* CROW's sword drops and he slinks back R., and exit. STARLING takes sword and stands guarding PRINCESS at C. Chorus flocks in, singing.

Chorus—Boys and Girls.

Air—“Let Bucks a-hunting go.”

Come man, come maiden, with bright boughs laden,
And let the news go round.

The peril's past, and he comes at last,
Who in our hearts is crowned.

So here is luck to our Starling,
And here's our love to his darling.

(*pp*) He went downstairs for the Golden Hairs,
And brought them back to ground.

Come all, come both, and take your oath
A-kneeling on the plain,
The Tinker's son is the only one
That ever we want to reign.

So here is luck to our Starling,
And here's our love to his darling.

(*pp*) He went downstairs for the Golden Hairs,
But now he's come again.

Princess. [*looking round*] But where's Papa gone?

Star. Where is the King?

Voice. Never mind him, Miss: he's off, and a good riddance.

2nd Voice. There's no King but you.

Eel. [advancing] Highness, I will explain. While you were singing that pretty song, my late master, the King of Croatia, retreated.

Star. Retreated?

Eel. Yes. He went to have a look at the donkeys and the gold that her Highness mentioned. The gold he ordered to a safe place: then he mounted his swiftest steed and rode post-haste to the Ferry; for it seems he was told the fortune came from there.

Star. It is true.

Eel. So he thought there might be more gold the other side. He purposed to ask the Ferryman —

Star. Ah, stop him! Fate, fate — it is too late!

Enter FAG, dancing, L.

Song—FAG AND CHORUS.

Same Air as last.

O Fag is merry, he's left his ferry
A sailing from the beach.

The King's got hold, and he plies for gold,
Which never his fingers'll reach!

[All start chorus — “So here is luck
to our —” but break off.

Fag. Stop a minute! [Sings.]

I put the tiller in his hand
As that young chap said to do.

He took it tight and he'll ferry all night,
And all of the next day too!

[Same business; chorus interrupted.

Stop a minute, stop a minute! [Sings.]

He had a crownd upon his head
And a sharp sword at his thigh,
It'll get in his way when he ferries all day,
And his crown'd is over one eye!

[Pause, while he recovers from laughter; then chorus.

So here is luck to our Starling,
And here's a kiss to our darling.
The black King Crow to the shades must go,
And serve it him right, say I!

[All marching.]

And serve it him right, say I;
And serve it him right, say I;
The black King Crow to the shades must go,
And serve it him right, say I!

[Curtain.]

The Robber Bridegroom
(After Grimm)

CHARACTERS.

PETER THE MILLER.
DAME NANCY, *his sister.*
MAY, *his daughter.*
ROBIN, *the charcoal-burner.*
GRIST, *the Miller's boy.*
NETTIE, *the gypsy-girl.*
GO-BETWEEN, *the pedlar.*
SIR MUMMERY GREYSKIN.
JACK-O'-LANTERN, *his friend.*
THE ROBBER'S NURSE.
GRUFFY, *Robber-children.*

GRIZEL,

Chorus of Children. Chorus of Robbers.

[*Note*.—Peter, Nettie, Go-between, and Nurse should be able to sing well. Robin should sing a little. The part of the Nurse may be doubled with that of Dame Nancy.

Note on costume.—A hood of shaggy brown stuff, with ears, would be effective for wolf-children. Jack has a cloak and slouch hat like Greyskin, but a bulrush for a feather, and dark-coloured tights beneath, and is lean and active. For his lantern an electric torch alone will do, but a torch inside a lantern, with means to touch spring, is better.

Robin is blackened with cork and Grist whitened with flour.]

SCENES.

ACT I. *Outside the Miller's House.*

ACT II. SCENE I. *The Forest.*

SCENE II. *The Robber's Kitchen.*

ACT III. *Same as Act I.*

NOTE ON THE MUSIC.

The airs to which the songs are intended to be sung can be found in the song-books named below. Several are well known and occur in many other collections of English songs.

1. *Sweet Nightingale.* English Folk-songs for Schools, by S. Baring Gould and Cecil Sharp. (Curwen & Sons.)
2. *Leezie Lindsay.* National Song Book. (Boosey & Co.)
3. *Cockles and Mussels.* Scottish Students' Song Book.
4. *Gossip Joan.* Songs of the British Islands, by W. H. Hadow. (Curwen & Sons.)
5. *Sally in our Alley.* Scottish Students' Song Book.
6. *Gaudeamus Igitur* (Bird Song). Gaudeamus, by J. Farmer (Cassell & Co.); Scottish Students' Song Book.
7. *My Lodging is on the Cold Ground.* N.B.—This is the minor tune, as in Songs of the Four Nations (Cramer & Co.) or Old English ditties (Chappell & Co.)
8. *How Should I* (Ophelia's song in Hamlet). Traditional stage air.
9. *Down Among the Dead Men.* Scottish Students' Song Book, etc.
10. *The Wraggle-Taggle Gypsies.* English Folk-songs for Schools (as No. 1).
11. *Eileen Aroon.* National Song Book (as No. 2).

THE ROBBER BRIDEGROOM

ACT I. *Outside the Miller's House.*

SCENE I.—*Front of MILLER'S house, L., with entrance door, and window above it. Down R. a large board, with "Private Residence," or some such notice on it. R. is the path to the forest. By this path enter ROBIN, GRIST carrying flowers, and chorus of children, with baskets and green boughs. The tune is played through once as they enter.*

Chorus of Children.

Air—“Sweet Nightingale.”

Boys and girls, come along
And join in our song,
For this is the fine holiday.
We have come here to call
On the fairest of all,
And to crown her the queen of the May,
 Of the May,
To enthrone her the queen of the May.
All. [hands up to the window] May! May!

Enter from the house, L., DAME NANCY, with a feather-broom, making passes at the children.

D. Nancy. Highty-tighty, what's all this? Are gentry folk never to have any quiet? Don't you know these fields are private property, and this is the Miller's new house?

1st Girl. It's the Miller's daughter we are seeking.

D. Nancy. I dare say. My niece May is not for the likes of you, *this year*. She's to marry a gentleman.

All. [disappointed] A gentleman?

Grist. [behind, sing-song] A gentleman?

D. Nancy. Grist, do I see you among this rabble? Come here! [She takes him by the ear.] You belong to the mill.

All. Oh, she's taking away our white boy!

[ROBIN advances R.C. and sings.

Silly girls, come along,

We are doing no wrong,

And in Maytime we go where we will.

[Meaningly to MAY's window.]

If she's too proud to play,

We will soon go away,

But a Miller should live in a mill,

In a mill,

A Miller should live in a mill.

Grist. Mistress, it was Black Robin, the charcoal-burner, singing that.

D. Nancy. Like his impudence.

Grist. Ay, mistress. It's better to have a white face like mine, than a black one like his'n. If I was Miss May, I'd know which to choose on us, so I would.

D. Nancy. As if she thought of either of you! Who are those flowers for?

Grist. [thumb up to window] Her.

[DAME NANCY throws them away, and cuffs him. Children have been filing out R., pointing at the board. ROBIN, left to the last, picks up one of GRIST's flowers and throws it at the upper window. Then he advances softly behind DAME NANCY, and sings.

Robin.

Miller Peter's got gold
And Dame Nancy's a scold
And in Maytime I go where I will,
Where I will,

[spoken suddenly]

And a Miller should live in a mill.

[Exit ROBIN

D. Nancy. [jumping] A nasty, dirty gipsy-fellow! I only hope May heard nothing. [Glances up at window.] Throw all those flowers on the scrap-heap — quick, before my brother comes.

[Exit GRIST up L. with flowers. Enter MILLER PETER from the house-door with a band-box.

Miller. Good-morrow, sister. Here is a token I brought you from the town last night. It's a cap, fashionable. [Business.] I thought you would like it, against the girl's wedding.

D. Nancy. What wedding?

Miller. Why, my little maid's. I picked up quite a likeable kind of suitor for her yesterday: better than any offer I have had. I don't say it's settled, but —

D. Nancy. Settled? My niece's husband? Without consulting me? I suppose you got drinking after market, and took the first offer that came. Belike some beery corn-factor.

Miller. No, no, sister: better than that. A gentleman. [*Winks.*] With a sword. [*Winks.*] I heard all about him, too, from his best friend, and you know best friends are truthful. Oh, he'll be a smart son-in-law, I'll warrant. I dare say he will come to dinner today.

D. Nancy. What? And no fire in the house? Ah, brother, you were ever hasty! What do friends know? Do you mean you never saw the gentleman himself?

Miller. Oh yes, I saw him, so to say. He was, as it were, in a manner of speaking ——but wait. You shall hear the tale.

[*He sits C. with pipe, and sings.*

Song, with Action—MILLER.

Air—“Leezie Lindsay.”

I.

I went to the market on a Monday:
I met there with pretty men three:
They all would come a-courting my little Mary:
Her bridegroom and my son-in-law for to be.

D. Nancy. Three? Highty-tighty, and I never heard of one!

Miller.

II.

The first he had a pocketful of silver,
The next he had farming-land free,
And the third he'd a swagger here and a sword
there,
Her bridegroom and a gentleman for to be.

D. Nancy. [aside] My poor brother does not know a gentleman when he sees one!

Miller.

III.

I said Pish and Pshaw to the first one,
 I said nonny-no to the second,
 And I jogged off again on my homeward way,
 A third [*at that time o' night*] being more than
 I had reckoned.

D. Nancy. You mean you fell in with the third coming home? You would marry your little daughter to a chance acquaintance? By night? And when you were tipsy, too!

Miller. Now listen:

IV.

I met with two gentlemen at the crossways,
 With cloaks and a bearing so free:
 And one of them had heard of my little Mary,
 And was sighing my son-in-law for to be.

D. Nancy. Did he tell you so?

Miller. Listen:

V

His love kept him silent and moody,
 His cloak was right over his face:
 I talked with the other one who bore a lantern,
 The ways of the woodland for to trace.

D. Nancy. [doubtful] A lantern.

Miller.

VI.

It seems he has a Castle over yonder,
 With servants and fine horses in stall;

I said on his [*excellent*] offer I would ponder,
And today for my answer he could call.

[*To D. Nancy.*] There now!

D. Nancy. Mercy on us! A castle! [*Calling.*] May! May! Come down, child, quickly!

Enter MAY L. in a white frock, with a flower.

She walks slowly to C. between them.

Oh goodness, child, what did you put on *that* old frock for. Today of all days! Listen you here, what your good father has for you.

May. For me?

D. Nancy. [*stage whisper*] A husband.

Miller. How would you like to wed a gentleman?

D. Nancy. [*as before*] Rich!

Miller. Dying for you!

D. Nancy. Or for your father's gold.

Miller. Horses, servants, a sword and moustachios. A castle in a wood. Everything tidy.

D. Nancy. Well, you *are* a lucky little girl!

May. What is his name?

Miller. Ah — hum — that I hardly know at present. Be off, now, and put on your best fal-lals. He is coming today, as it were, to have a look at you. Come, sister, as to the dinner, I must have a word.

[*Exeunt into house L.*

May. Husband? A gentleman? Me? [*ROBIN comes from R.*] Oh, Robin, they say I am to be married. Have you heard?

Robin. I've heard something.

May. A castle in the wood he has, my father says. You burn charcoal in the wood, don't you? Have you ever seen a castle there?

Robin. I have heard of one, out beyond the marshes. Nettie the gipsy-girl told me. The Wolf's Castle, they call it.

May. [smiling] Is my bridegroom a wolf, then?

Enter GRIST R., introducing strangers.

Grist. Sir Mummery Greyskin.

May. Oh heavens, it is he!

[*She runs away, L. Enter R. GREYSKIN disguised, and JACK-O'-LANTERN, carrying an unlighted lantern, concealing a flashlight inside.*

Jack. Stay, stay, my pretty maid. [To GREYSKIN.] Why, that must have been the fair May in person. [To ROBIN.] Do you know her, my boy?

Robin. Well enough. She was my playmate.

Jack. Was?

Robin. She is too fine now to play with me. My black hands would spoil her city frocks.

[*Exit ROBIN up R. Enter MILLER and DAME NANCY from L., magnificent.*

Miller. Your servant, sirs — my lord, I should say. My sister and housewife. [*Salutations.*] My daughter will be with us anon. You will excuse, sir, her shyness. [*Doubtful.*] Do I address her would-be suitor?

Greyskin. [gruff] You do, sir. Here, Jack.

[*JACK puts down presents.*]

D. Nancy. Mercy on us!

Jack. I think we caught sight of her lately, in converse with a black boy. Blackish.

D. Nancy. That rascally charcoal-burner.

[*To GREYSKIN.*] A regular gipsy, my lord. The woods hereabouts are full of shady characters. Do you not think so?

Jack. In shady parts, that's natural.

Miller. [To *GREYSKIN*] I hope you liked my daughter's looks, sir.

Greyskin. She seemed a nice little lamb. I love lambs.

D. Nancy. My poor dear sister called her May, because she was so fresh and innocent. [Aside.] Silly, I should say.

Greyskin. She's motherless, eh?

D. Nancy. Alas, yes. [*GREYSKIN grunts.*] What did you say, sir?

Jack. My friend said, happy the orphan that has so fair an aunt to replace her natural guardian.

D. Nancy. Indeed? Your friend is a flatterer. [Aside.] This follower-fellow talks too much. The short speech of Sir Mummery pleases me better, showing the truer breeding. [To *GREYSKIN*.] Talking of shady characters, sir, did you ever meet the rogue Jack-o'-Lantern, that haunts the marshes yonder? Between ourselves, I believe that Robin Chips and he are hand-in-glove.

Jack. [*pushing lantern out of sight*] They are, ma'am. That boy keeps strange company. It were better not to have him about. [*Grunt.*] My friend agrees with me.

Miller. I have forbidden him the house, but he comes about again, at times, with the other brats. On holiday, there's no way of it.

Greyskin. Why not put him in a mill-sack, and tie the mouth of it, and drop him in the mill-race? [*Jack whispers to him.*]

D. Nancy. Ha, ha! A pretty wit. You are joking, sir. •

Greyskin. It's only, he said there was no way.
Grumph! [Jack whispers.]

Miller. If you dislike the young charcoal-burner,
sir, we will see no more of him. [Enter MAY L.]
Ah — ha! My daughter, Sir Mummery Greyskin.
[Salutations. They take seats. Long
pause. Grunt from GREYSKIN.]

Jack. Fair May, my friend is a man of few
words, but much feeling. Your charms have over-
come him. Since first he heard tell of you, he
has not been able to sleep by night, or speak by
day. Yet he loves you.

Greyskin. Fair maiden — [Signs to Jack,
who hands pearls.]

D. Nancy. Mercy on us!

Miller. Thank the gentleman, child. [MAY
turns to JACK, uncertain.] No, the other one,
stupid.

May. I thank you, sir.

Greyskin. [hoarsely] There's more where those
came from.

D. Nancy. Mercy on us!

Greyskin. You'd see, if you came to visit me.

May. To visit you, sir? [JACK whispers.]

Greyskin. Why shouldn't she come to visit
me? The way is quite easy. She'd see then for
herself.

D. Nancy. We are told, sir, you have a Castle.

Greyskin. Tell her about the Castle, Jack.

Jack. The Castle where my friend lives is —
something like a Castle. You never saw such a
Castle as it is. [Gestures.] It's — to begin with,
it's —

Greyskin. Stop, you had better sing it.

Jack. I have no voice. [Music heard without
R.] The very thing! I'll get that pedlar to sing

it: we passed him on the road. He will do anything for sixpence, [*aside*] and he has a way with womenfolk. What do you say, sir?

Greyskin [*aside*] Grumph! It might help us. The girl looks dull.

Jack. I'll slip aside and tell him. Do you go into the house.

[*Line of Pedlar's song heard off R.*

D. Nancy. [*looking R.*] Why, here's the dear pedlar coming. I wonder what fashions he has to sell. [*She goes R. to gape.*]

Miller. A pedlar! Women are always after pedlars. A pedlar's the same as a meddler, say I.

Greyskin. [*sniffing*] Fuff! I smell something savoury. What have you for dinner, dame?

D. Nancy. Roast lamb, so please you, sir.

Greyskin. Lamb? I love lamb!

Miller. Sister! [*Shakes her as she gapes off at pedlar.*] Sister, Sir Greyskin is waiting to see the house. [*Exeunt L. GREYSKIN and DAME NANCY.*] May!

May. [*as he goes to her*] Father, may I not stay without a little?

Miller. Do you not like my choice?

May. O yes: but I fear him rather. He is so — silent.

Miller. Ah, that is because he is such a gentleman, such a — such a — Hum, you will soon get used to it. Come!

[*MAY comes unwillingly. He draws her off L.*

[*Curtain for a minute.*]

SCENE II.—*Same as I.* Enter R. GO-BETWEEN the Pedlar, hobbling, with pack and bird-cage, followed by children, led by NETTIE, peeping. JACK comes last, during song.

Song— Go-BETWEEN.

Air—“Cockles and Mussels.”

From London's fair city,
Where the ladies are pretty,
A-hawking, a-talking, a pedlar I come;
Your secrets, if any,
I'll sell for one penny,
So some will be dumb if they're wise, a wise-O.

Chorus.

Wise, a wise-O,
Pretty girls will be dumb if they're wise, a wise-O.

Go-between. Who's got a secret? [Children cry "I."] Eh? eh? Let him sell it me, and he'll be relieved of it, and I'll be richer by a penny. But I can guess what it is. [Children cry "No you can't."] My little bird here told me.

Children. We don't believe in your little bird.

Go-between. Ah, but my little bird knows everything. I wouldn't sell him, not for a hundred pennies.

[He puts down pack and bird-cage up C. Children crowd round there looking at wares, etc. JACK comes forward to pedlar L.C.]

Jack. Who are you?

Go-between. Go-between the pedlar.

Jack. What do you know?

Go-between. Know? Everything. Not a secret in the land but I know it, and hand it about. That's what I'm good for, master.

Jack. Do you know the rich miller hereabouts?

Go-between. Ah, that I do. He that has a pretty daughter, and a silly dame. Oh, I've had business with both. I sell silks to the dame, and to the maiden I sell —

Jack. What?

Go-between. Secrets! That pays still better. [Jingles pouch.] I say that this and that young fellow is dying of love for her. They pay me to tell, and she pays me to hear. At least her aunt does. Oh, I've made a power of money out of Miller's May.

Jack. Well, now, suppose I had a friend, and the friend was courting Miss May, an accepted suitor —

Go-between. Accepted? Never! There's an end of money in that direction. [Turns to children.] Shoo, you little rascals. Shoo!

Jack. Suppose my friend wanted to please her, and make her happy.

Go-between. Isn't the bride happy?

Jack. What should he do?

Go-between. He should give her pretties: I've a plenty here. [To children.] Shoo! See there! — and he should hire me to tell her things.

Jack. What things?

Go-between. Why, anything! I've a dozen tales of fine bridegrooms, and for a penny down he can have any of them, or sixpence the lot.

Jack. Doesn't it matter what my friend really is?

Go-between. Not a bit, so he be rich to pay for tale-bearing.

Jack. You're the man for me. He's rich enough, but tongue-tied.

Go-between. [sly] What is he by the way?

Jack. Ah! [Gives money.] He's as good a man as I am.

Go-between. And what are you?

Jack. Lighting's my trade. I guide poor wayfarers through the forest there.

Go-between. [shrinking] Are you he they call Jack-o'-Lantern?

Jack. Why not? Shall I guide you, next time you travel toward? [Turns light on.] Shall I guide you?

Go-between. N-no, sir. Kind sir, what is your will, or your friend's will? It's all one to me [quavering] so he p-pay for it.

Jack. [snaps off lantern] Admirable. My friend is a mighty lord. He lives beyond the marshes there in his marble halls, and so on. Maidens have died for love of him, and so forth. Make the best of that, now, and charm the ladies.

Go-between. That I will.

[Exit JACK into house L. GO-BETWEEN takes an instrument out of pack and returns L.C. under MAY'S window. Children retire into hiding, except NETTIE, who peers in round door once or twice during song, and finally takes seat beneath board down R. to listen.

Song—Go-BETWEEN.

Air—“Gossip Joan.”

I.

Good Morrow, Miller's May,
 I hope I don't importune,
 I have for you today,
 I have for you today,
 A budget of good fortune,
 Miller's May.

II.

You've made a conquest grand,
 I hope you won't deride him,
 The noblest of the land
 (I have it at first hand)
 Would look poor things beside him,
 Miller's May.

III.

He owns a castle-keep
 Out there beyond the marshes;
 They say the king can't sleep,
 With envy fierce and deep,
 Perhaps the judgment harsh is,
 Miller's May.

IV.

His skill with sword and bow
 Is really most impressive,
 He scares the doughtiest foe;
 And slays seven at a blow,
 Perhaps the tale's excessive,
 Miller's May.

His figure's neat and fine,
 His face is perfect nearly,
 They say that maidens nine
 Have died in a decline,
 They loved him so severely,
 Miller's May.

[*Between Verses I. and II.* Go-BETWEEN pauses to listen; then shakes head and continues. At end he waits again, puffing and peering at window.]

Go-between. Well, well, if that's not a good song for a penny, I don't know what is. It's double measure.

Nettie. It's a twopenny song.

Go-between. What?

Nettie. I'd sing her myself better than that.

Go-between. You would? And who are you?

Nettie. Nettie the gypsy-girl. I live in the forest, like Robin. I know about that castle you sing of more than you do. [Enter ROBIN R. with hatchet on shoulder.] Robin knows what I do, don't you Robin? We don't believe your silly songs.

Go-between. Smudgy gypsy brats! As if it matters what you believe. Give me my pack. I'll try the aunt now. *She'll* believe anything.

[Exit GO-BETWEEN to house. ROBIN advances C.]

Nettie. Robin, the bridegroom and the Miller have settled it. May is to marry him next week.

Robin. Next week? [NETTIE nods.] You've been listening at the door, Nettie.

Nettie. [nods] Gypsies do things like that. For other people, it is naughty: not for them. I was badly brought up. [Crosses L. and pirouettes.] See me dance, Robin.

Robin. Not today. I must think about this.

Nettie. I'll think too. [Returns to seat, and sits, finger to forehead: then jumps up.] Why, there's my bird!

Robin. [looking at bird-cage] It's the pedlar's bird.

Nettie. It's my bird. All the birds in the forest are mine. Ha, ha! I shall pay the pedlar out for his story-telling. [Opens door of cage, and claps hands.] Fly, my pretty one, fly. There it goes. [Follows it with her eyes.] Now it's mine.

Robin. It's a wise bird. It tells the pedlar things — secrets.

Nettie. Well, it shall still tell secrets if it likes to. Only if it likes. My bird, my bird! Hark!

[*A bird-trill or chirrup heard. Re-enter children clamouring.*

All. Oh, oh, the pedlar's clever bird has escaped! We heard it whistle.

Nettie. Hush! I have news for you, sadder than that. It's about our playmate May.

[*Children stand in semicircle across stage. NETTIE whispers them all in turn.*

Girls. Next week?

Boys. Next week?

Song with Action and Dance ad lib.

Air—“Sally in our Alley.”

[*Slow and tender.*]

Girls.

Alas, our May that might-have-been
Is marrying the stranger,
We hoped she would be May the Queen,
But now we have to change her.

Boys.

How glad we were, an hour ago,
How sad is now the sequel:
For seek we high or seek we low,
We ne'er shall find her equal.

[*All repeat chorus.*]

Girls.

With cowslips and with lilies fresh
And hyacinths we'd have crowned her,
A lamb's-wool cloak of finest mesh
We'd woven, to throw around her.

Boys.

With many a green and leafy bough,
We'd built a throne so shady.
And shall we lose our labour now
That May's become a lady?

[*They point to NETTIE, and ring her round.*

Girls.

She's not so gentle or so wise,
She's not so kind or pretty:
But now that May's the stranger's prize
We must put up with Nettie.

Boys.

She's brown and badly dressed, I ween,
She's naughty, too, I'll bet ye:
But now that May's another's queen,
We must put up with Nettie.

[*Ceremony of crowning, etc. Curtain.*]

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*The Forest. Path from MILLER'S house comes in L., the marsh is up R. with a just-indicated ash-path across it, reaching stage. Up L. is a wing or bush, as cover for robbers. The singers of the bird's song may also be concealed here: or may be in orchestra, front of stage.*

[Enter JACK R., with lantern unlighted.]

Jack. A gray evening—a good evening. We shall have game soon. Perhaps a schoolboy playing truant, perhaps a fat farmer from market, perhaps a pretty girl—why, the fair May herself might come, for Greyskin asked her to tea—any day. Ha, ha! He bade me lay that nice path of ashes over the marsh for her fairy feet. Ha, ha! He wants her to get safe across, for once: safe to his marble halls; so he spoiled my game, ha, ha! [He flashes the lantern and lifts it.] Here comes somebody. I will disguise myself. [He pulls a hood and cloak over him, and hides up L. Enter NETTIE and ROBIN L. by path.]

Nettie. Yes, he did: he asked her to tea, I heard him.

Robin. Nettie, you've been listening at the door.

Nettie. No, since they crowned me Queen I don't do things like that. I was only just straying around the arbour where they were talking, and I happened to hear. She was to go to tea at the Castle—any day, he said. She said, some day.

Robin. Well, why shouldn't she go to tea, some day.

Nettie. Robin! It's over the marsh.

Robin. [cross] He wouldn't eat her.

Nettie. I'm not so sure of that. There are signs I do not like. See this path of ashes — who put that down?

Robin. It's a path, sure enough.

Nettie. Yes, but think how easily ashes blow away. A path is no path unless it stays there.

Robin. You're very clever.

Jack. [aside] Too clever. Gypsies are sorcerers. Something, I think, should be done with this girl. I must consider what.

Nettie. And several times I have seen the flash of Jack-o'-Lantern over there, these gray evenings. And then, the birds!

Robin. What of the birds?

Nettie. Since I let the pedlar's clever bird out, I have heard warnings, up in the trees, all about this part of the wood. [A bird whistle.] Listen! That is he. What does he say to you?

Robin. Nothing.

Nettie. To me it makes sense.

[A whistle, soft music, and first four lines of the bird's song are heard distinctly.]

Bird's Song.

Air—"Gaudeamus igitur."

Turn again, my bonnie bride,
 Turn again, we warn you!
 Go not from your father's side,
 Lest the birds should mourn you.

Nettie. Do you hear that? She must be coming.

Robin. Coming? [He crosses to L. and sees JACK disguised in the path.] What nonsense you do talk, Nettie. It's only a silly old woman. You and your birds!

Nettie. Oh Robin, how can you say such things to me — and when I am trying to help you!

Robin. Help me?

Nettie. Of course. Don't I know you always —

Jack. [advancing L] My pretty young lady — my good young gentleman, don't fall out, now, on a fine evening. Will you buy some fine marsh-marigolds?

Nettie. No, thank you. [Hesitates.] Oh, they are fine ones. Where did she find them?

Jack. Out there on the marsh. [Points R.]

Nettie.) But isn't it dangerous?

Robin.)

Jack. Oh no, perfectly safe at this time of year. Even an old body like me can pick flowers for the market easily.

Robin. There, Nettie, there's no danger! You and your silly birds!

[*Bird whistle.* Exit ROBIN L.

Nettie. But, Robin — Robin, don't go! I'm sure something will happen soon. [*Bird whistle · owl hoot:* stage grows dark.] Robin! Oh!

[*JACK throws off cloak, and two Robbers overpower NETTIE, and carry her step by step across the marsh. Flashes in distance R. Owls hoot again. Silence: light grows.* Enter MAY L.]

May. I wonder if we are going to have a storm. It looked so dark lately, [*flash R.*] and I'm sure

I saw lightning. Can this be the way? Oh, yes, it must be — what a nice ash-path.

[*She moves R. but stops at a strain of music.*

Bird-song as before.

I.

Turn again, my bonnie bride,
 Turn again, we warn you!
 Go not from your father's side,
 Lest the birds should mourn you.
 O be heedful, it is needful,
 Do not wander over yonder,
 Turn again, bonnie, bonnie bride. [Twice.]

II.

Turn again, my bonnie bride,
 Turn again, we entreat you.
 Go not where is none to guide,
 Where the marsh-lights cheat you.
 On the track now see them hover,
 Turn you back now to your lover,
 Turn again, bonnie, bonnie bride. [Twice.]

May. How curious! I am sure I heard music.
 [Flash.] It is quite true there are funny lights down there. But — oh, what beautiful marsh-marigolds! I really must pick a few.

Enter GRIST up R.

Grist. Oh dear, oh dear, she's lost. She's lost.

May. [turning back] Who is lost?

Grist. Nettie. You know Nettie, her that dances — so! [He imitates, then recognizes MAY.] Why, it's you, Miss!

May. Grist, you silly boy, what are you doing out of father's mill?

Grist. I'll tell you. I'm Prime Minister.

May. What?

Grist. To the May Queen. That's Nettie now, her that's lost. [Relates.] It was all dark and queerish, and I heard a scream. [Hugs himself.] They birds whistled rarely.

May. Oh, nonsense! Grist, you were always a silly boy.

Grist. It's a kind of wool in my head, comes of snuffing up the flour. How fine you are, Miss!

May. I'm going to a party, at a Castle. [Curtseys.]

Grist. I'll come along, for to take care of you.

May. Poor boy, you'd better take care of yourself, and go straight back to the mill. You know the way, don't you? What are those?

Grist. [who has produced a handful of beans] Peas and beans, to find the way with. [Relates.] We take wheat-flour, and we take rye-flour, and when that's short we take pea-flour and bean-flour and mix it in. Cheaper, but sell un dear. That's how Miller makes his money.

May. I am sure it can't be! Father make money like that! But how can they show you the way, Grist?

Grist. I'll tell you. Because if there's a hole in your pocket, they fall out, and take root, and grow, and grow, this side, and that side, and you see the way easily. [Coaxing.] Take some of them in your pocket, Miss.

May. [laughing] Poor boy, I have no need of beans. Look at these nice ashes, laid ready. The path is straight and clean.

[GRIST picks up ash, looks at it, puffs out cheeks, blows, shakes head: then turns and thrusts beans into MAY's hand.]

Grist. Look you, Miss, you take un. There!

May. [taking them and waving hand] Good-bye, Grist, I shall be late for the party.

[She goes R. by ash-path. GRIST goes L., unwillingly, turning every minute. Stage darkens, owls hoot. He is seized and carried off like NETTIE, only L. Silence, then JACK comes dancing across front of stage L. to R., carrying a birdcage, and pointing with triumph to feathers within.]

[Curtain.]

SCENE II.—*The Wolf's Castle.* A rough kitchen: tripod and pot for cooking up L.C. Birdcage hanging down R. Large cask down L. with small table for glasses, etc. Entrance L. behind it. ROBBERS' NURSE enters R., calling.

Nurse. Gruffy! Grizel! Where have those children got to? Gruffy! Grizel! I know they're after those chickens again! Whatever will their big brother Wolf say, when he gets back from the old world with Master Jack!

Song—NURSE.

Air—“My Lodging it is on the Cold Ground.”

I.

My lodging it is in a Castle,
 But hard, very hard is my lot,
 For these kind o' children they have here
 Are the worst that were ever begot.
 And still I cry for the old world,
 Where once I was living so free,
 And the good little, smooth little children,
 And a proper kept nursery.

For this one isn't decent-looking, it really isn't.
 There's another bone Gruffy has brought in. The
 child he is! [*Throws it away, and moves about
 tidying, while she sings.*]

II.

I'm servant to people of fortune,
 But hard, very hard is my life;
 Now big brother Wolf's gone a-courtin',
 Will have goodness knows what for a wife!
 But still I sigh for the old world
 Where once I was living so free,
 And a nice looking Missus to work for,
 And a proper kept nursery.

[*Stops in front of bird-cage R.*]

Where's that bird come from, now? That's
 something they brought in. Seems alive, though
 you wouldn't think it, knowing their ways. Ah,
 poor thing, it's caged, like me. [*Weeps.*] And
 all I ask is something to care for!

Bird-song [two lines.]

Turn again, my bonnie bride,
Turn again, we warn you.

Nurse. [starts] Well, I'm blest! What's that?

[*Steps — she hides, down L., behind cask. Enter MAY L.*]

May. Again? That is the voice I heard in the wood. But how can I turn, dear bird? I do not even know where I have got to. It must be the Castle, but it does not look like one! And where is Greyskin, my bridegroom? [Sees *Nurse.*] A human being, at last! Please, ma'am, would you tell me —

Nurse. [nervous] Eh? What is it?

May. Does my bridegroom live here?

Nurse. Your bridegroom? . . . Ah, poor bird, poor bird!

May. [trembling] What do you mean?

Nurse. You're another of them. You have flown straight into the snare, like the rest.

May. What?

Nurse. There have been nine, nigh as pretty as you, the Wolf has caught. Poor flutterer! Did no one warn you of your danger, coming here?

May. A Wolf? [Covers her face.] Ah, the voices in the woods! Birds, my friends, why did I not heed you? [Sinks into chair, R.] But that friend of his, so polite, so obliging —

Nurse. Jack — Jack-o'-Lantern — false Jack, a friend indeed, who sets his snares.

May. They are robbers, then?

Nurse. All wolves are robbers, murderers too. Had you no shepherd, poor lamb? [MAY shakes

her head.] Ah, it is a nurse you should have had! [Wipes eyes.] Just such a one I could have cared for, in the old world!

May. Nurse, O mother, help me then! [Growls heard without.] What is that?

Nurse. That's the children. They scratch a bit, but nothing to matter: not much nip in them at present. All the same, they might snuff you. You had better hide.

May. Where?

Nurse. Here, behind the cask. Quick! [MAY hides down L. behind cask.] Lie there soft and silent, no motion, lest death befall you.

[She sweeps room again, singing.

Song—NURSE.

Air—“How should I my true Love know.”

How should I my false love know
From another one?
By his hairy long gray ears,
And his honey tone.

He is not your love, ladye,
He's a wolf beside:
And with Death you'd wedded be,
As the Robber's Bride.

[Enter GRIZEL and GRUFFY, softly L.
GRUFFY knocks NURSE'S cap off,
then both dart at the bird-cage.

Gruffy. I'll kill it.

Grizel. No, I'll kill it. [Both seize cage.] Oh, nurse, he says he'll kill it, and I do want to so!

Nurse. Oh, sakes of mercy, the children they

are! You can't *both* kill it. Let the poor thing alone, it sings so pretty.

Gruffy. It's my bird, Jack gave it me.

Grizel. [whining] No, it's *my* bird. Jack said it should be *my* bird, and I could kill it all myself.

Gruffy. [letting go the cage] Oh well, I don't care. Jack will catch me others — there's better game. I say, Nurse! [*Hallos in her ear.*] Nurse!

Nurse. Oh lawk-a-mercy, the boy you are! Grow up just like Big Brother, you will.

Gruffy. I hope so. Then I'll kill better than birds. Oho! What do you think they have got this time, Nurse? You'll never guess.

Grizel. Oo—ooh! No, you'll never guess. [Chuckles.] A girl!

May. [aside] Alas, my heart! I shall die of fear, in this dreadful place.

Nurse. Lawk-a-mercy! Not a tenth?

Gruffy. What do you mean, Nurse, a tenth? She's a girl, rather a good one — Jack's got her. She's a gypsy-kind, sings, dances, fights —! She nearly got off, once. You never saw such fun. Nothing to the fun they'll have with her tonight, though.

May. Alas!

Gruffy. I'm for putting her in a cage. Then she could sing to us — like that bird. Just for a time, Nurse — like that bird.

Grizel. [whining] It's *my* bird.

Gruffy. There was a boy, too, they caught. A white boy.

May. My poor Grist!

Gruffy. But they dropped him again, he was such a silly. Jack dropped him in the marsh, oho! — in the blackest pool. When he crawled out, half-dead, he wasn't a white boy. Almost as good

as drowning him, that was. Oh, I thought I should die!

[*Sinks into chair R.* GRIZEL opens door of cage, takes a bunch of feathers from it, and prepares to steal out.

Grizel. I'll kill it now. [Exit R.]

Nurse. Lawk-a-mercy, what awful children!

[*Noise heard without, L.* Enter ROBBERS and JACK, with NETTIE bound and blindfolded.

Greyskin. [to ROBBERS] Put the girl down, anywhere, I've had enough of her.

Jack. [rubbing scratches] So have I.

Robbers. So have we, my lord.

[They deposit NETTIE under cage down R.

Gruffy. Then can I have her, big brother?

Jack. No. And you get away, meddling. I gave you a bird.

Gruffy. I said it was mine. Grizel's got it.

Greyskin. Oh, then it will be safe enough.

Bird-song [faintly.]

Turn again, my bonnie bride,

Turn again, I warn you,

Haste you from the —

[*Voice stops as though choked.*

Gruffy. Did you hear? [Imitates choking.] Ha, ha!

Greyskin. Those singing-birds seem to haunt me. I always did hate singing.

Robbers. Except ours, my lord.

Greyskin. [dark] I put up with yours. Where's the wine, men?

Gruffy. [crossing L.] I'll mix it, big brother. Red wine, and white wine, and yellow wine. Such a dose she shall have, when she's sung to us.

Jack. Like the others.

Gruffy. Big brother, tell me about the others. Why are there nine?

Greyskin. That old hag has been talking. It's time we put an end to her.

Gruffy. Oh, may I have her, big brother?

Greyskin. Take care I don't finish you too, you little knave. The drink, men, I say! My drink, not the prisoner's. When I have drunk, it will be her turn.

Drinking Song—ROBBERS.

Air—“Down among the Dead Men.”

I.

O here's to the health of the Robber horde,
And here's to your luck in the hunt, my lord!
The shepherd's too sharp, and the sheep dog too,
But they'll never get the better of Greyskin's
crew.

Chorus—

And he that would this truth deny,
Down among the bread-crumbs let him lie!

Jack. Drink to the bride.

Robbers. Ha, ha!

II.

O here's to the health of the Robber's bride,
The nicest little lamb in the world so wide,
She's not ventured yet to come to tea,
But when she does come, you won't miss me!

1st Robber. You won't have a sight on her.

2nd Robber. Then you won't neither.

1st Robber. Would you?

2nd Robber. Would you?

[*They fight, singing.*

And he that would this truth deny,

Down among the bread-crumbs let him lie!

1st Robber. My lord he don't seem to be liking
our singing much.

2nd Robber. That was your singing like a nut-meg-grater.

1st Robber. No, it was your cock-crowing did
the trick. [*They brawl.*

May. Heaven help me!

Greyskin. [*gloomy*] She'll never come here,
Jack. I wish I had never seen the girl.

Jack. [*sulky*] I wish you hadn't either; she
is more trouble than all the rest put together.
There are those ashes I put down for her, fresh
every day. Everyone likely to advise her for her
good, I throttled promptly; but herself I cannot
catch.

Nettie. You never will!

Greyskin. Ah! Give that girl something to
quiet her, men.

Gruffy. Oh, let me!

[*Tableau.* GRUFFY hands three glasses,
red, white, and yellow. NETTIE
sips each, and falls fainting.
GRUFFY dances for joy. ROBBERS
sing last verse of song.]

III.

Oh here's to the power of the Robber band,
And nobody shall that power withstand.

A bird may be clever, a girl may be vain,
But Greyskin'll go one better, that's plain.

Chorus—And she that will, etc.

[*They prepare to carry her out, when Gruffy sees the ring.*

Gruffy. She's got a ring on her finger.

Greyskin. Hold, that's mine!

Gruffy. No, it's mine. I saw it first.

[*He snatches it, GREYSKIN springs up, boxes his ears, and rolls him over towards L.*

Greyskin. Where's the ring?

Gruffy. [blubbering] I've not got it. I think it flew behind the cask.

[*MAY holds up the ring to audience.*

Greyskin. Can't you be quiet? Men, get a light.

[*ROBBERS get a light and look tipsily about. NURSE advances from L.*

Nurse. Come, let me fill your glasses, sirs. The ring will be safe enough till tomorrow. It won't run away, I'll warrant.

[*Tableau, drinking. NURSE steals behind, and drops powder in glasses.*

ROBBERS fall asleep. MAY steals out, NURSE beckons her.

Nurse. Wait till I get my cloak and lantern, pretty; then we will both make off from this murderous den. Oh, if only the ashes be not blown off the path! If so, we may yet be drowned for our pains.

May. [to cage] Bird, dear bird, did she slay you? Will you not help us?

Bird-song [clearly.]

Turn again, my bonnie bride,
Winds the ashes scatter.
Black the marsh lies, black and wide,
Wait, what does it matter?
Peas and beans the white boy gave you,
They have fallen, they will save you,
Smile again, my bonnie bride. [Twice.]

May. Hark, did you hear anything? [Feels her pocket.] Why, they have all fallen out!

Nurse. What?

May. Peas and beans the white boy gave me. Something made me think of them. There must have been a hole in my pocket.

Nurse. Never mind, pretty, I will mend it. Anyhow, it will help us to find our way.

[*Exeunt L. Curtain.*]

ACT III.

*Same Scene as Act I.: evening light,
darkening during the scene.*

[*Cushions or seats for the bride's party L. of stage,
and bridegroom's party R., so that bride and
bridegroom are next each other C. Place for
a fire L.C. with sticks laid. DAME NANCY
discovered counting seats.]*

D. Nancy. Six this side for our party, seven over there for the bridegroom's. Thirteen to a wedding supper! — that will never do. And one makes fourteen: I dare say the pedlar will sit down with us. If it were not for the dear pedlar, going and coming between our poor home and the Castle, I don't know how this marrying would ever have taken place. But Go-between is so trustworthy — there he is!

[*Enter GO-BETWEEN from R. carrying his pack
with parcels, also the cauldron and tripod of
Act II. He sings as before.]*

Song—GO-BETWEEN.

Air—“Cockles and Mussels.”

From a certain great mansion,
Where things are so handsome,
A-hawking, a-talking, a pedlar I come.
A secret I'm spreading
Don't miss this rich wedding,
The fair will be there if they're wise, a wise O.
Lovely dames will be there, etc.

D. Nancy. Highty-tighty, flatterer! Come now, what are the bridegroom's latest wishes?

Go-between. Short shrift to ceremony, ma'am, and no lack of liquor.

D. Nancy. What, no speeches?

Go-between. Certainly not. Story-telling about the pot, in which the supper is broiling. [*He puts down the cauldron.*] Something homely and simple and soon over: except the drinking, and that may last all night.

D. Nancy. How very gentlemanly!

Go-between. Here are the bottles, which I procured for Sir Mummery at a bargain. These are gifts for the bridesmaids, and that a purse for the singers.

D. Nancy. You are the only musician.

Go-between. [*pocketing purse*] So I thought, dear lady, so I thought. [*He places bottles, singing.*]

Air—“The Wraggle-Taggle Gypsies.”

Oh, when you manage for a gentleman,
Then there is no mistaking O,
He finds the cash, and fills the can,
And all for the merry, merrymaking O.

He looks around him for a man of sense,
Whom there is no mistaking O,
To bustle between and save his pence,
And manage the merry, merrymaking O.

He pays me a penny an hour, he does, for managing. Now, ma'am, you remember our order. [*Reckons on fingers.*] First, the bride's party, by her best friend. Next, the bridegroom's party,

led by *his* best friend. Next, they all sit down to eat about the fire. Next, they all tell stories.

D. Nancy. Stories? What kind of stories? Will riddles do?

Go-between. No: ghost stories, by torch-light. Something about corpses, to make your blood curdle, is the bridegroom's idea: of course with a fashionable turn.

D. Nancy. Mercy on us, brother Peter will never do it. His stories are only fit to send you to sleep. Dear pedlar, *you* must help us! Pray find something fashionable.

Go-between. Trust me, trust me! I will sing them a ballad I have by me this long time. Three-and-forty verses, and a chorus to each [*aside*], and a penny a minute for singing it. [*Jingles pocket.*] Ah, ah! my pennies are mounting up. [*To Dame Nancy.*] There now, all is ready, and pretty it looks. I have but to warn the girls, who are waiting yonder. Is the bride prepared?

D. Nancy. I will see.

[*Exit DAME NANCY into house, L.*
GO-BETWEEN goes up R.C. Enter
R. the girls, straying in, and sit
languidly C.

Chorus—GIRLS.

Air—“Eileen Aroon.”

What's this dull wedding-day?
 Robin is glum:
 Nettie is stolen away:
 Our bird is dumb.

We are well-dressed, it's true,
Trinkets and ribbons, too,
All Greyskin's wealth can do:

Joy will not come.

[*Go-between bustles forward, a scroll or programme in his hand.*]

Go-between. Girls, girls, this will never do. Where is all my teaching? You are to be merry, and cluster about the bride. [*Begins to marshal them, but looks about.*] Where is that gypsy-girl? She was to lead you, on my list.

1st Girl. Nettie is lost.

Go-between. Tut, tut, she ought to know better, when she is on my list. [*Looks about suspiciously.*] That black boy, I hope he is not among you.

2nd Girl. Robin is sulky. He is working in the wood.

Go-between. Working? [*Peers in each face in turn.*] Working? Working? [*Hobbles away.*] Well, he's not wanted. There was a white boy, too.

1st Girl. Grist, yes. We have done our best to clean him, since his misadventure in the forest pool; but he is not as white as he was.

2nd Girl. And he's sillier than ever. You should hear him tell the tale of how it happened!

Go-between. Eh? Well, if he can tell a good story, we will have him, silly or no. [*Pompous.*] Tell him that Sir Mummery's major-domo requires his presence.

1st Girl. I think Grist will come, anyhow: he's so foolish, you know. But nobody ever attends to him.

All. [*absently and sing-song*] No, nobody ever attends to him.

2nd Girl. Except May.

1st Girl. Oh yes, May is kind to Grist. But she doesn't love him like Robin.

All. [as before] Oh no: she doesn't love him like Robin.

Go-between. [scandalized] Hey, hey? What's this nonsense about loving? Get you gone, you little hussies, wasting my time: which is precious, a penny a minute!

All Girls. I'm sure we meant no harm, Mr. Pedlar.

[*Exeunt girls to house L. arm-in-arm and giggling. Soft music of "Eileen Aroon."* They return drawing MAY with them, in bridal dress, and followed presently by MILLER and DAME NANCY. Girls group round MAY L.C. and sing quietly.]

Chorus—GIRLS [as before].

What's this dull wedding day?
Robin's not here.
Nettie is stolen away:
No bird to cheer.
Skies are so dark and stern,
For some new sign we yearn,
Bird, O our Bird, return,
Sing to us, dear!

1st Girl. [shivering] Oh, how dark it is getting! I don't like wedding parties in the twilight, do you?

[Stage darkens. A jingle in distance.
Grieg Wedding March heard.
 Enter ROBBERS and WOLF-CHILDREN with lanterns R., led by JACK dancing.* They group themselves. Girls shrink away. Then enter GREYSKIN, and sits by MAY C.

Go-between. [rather nervous, rubbing hand] Merriment, how, my masters, merriment! Eat, drink, and be merry!

Robbers. Ha, ha! [Girls shrink away.]

Miller. I hope you are well served, sir. I trust everything is as a gentleman would wish.

Go-between. These girls are as nicely got up as I could manage. The music is as cheap as I could get. The flowers are a regular bargain.

Greyskin. Flowers, forsooth! What's in the pot?

Miller. A nice young kid, so please you: as tender-broiled as we could make it.

Robbers. A kid! Ha, ha!

Go-between. [behind his hand, over GREYSKIN'S shoulder] What do you say to the bride? She's tender also, eh?

Greyskin. Something white and proud, but she'll do.

Go-between. She'll brighten up. Stories, now, stories! Who has a pretty tale to tell the company?

Jack. Peter Miller!

Miller. [clearing throat] I went to the market on a Saturday — I'd rather not, your honour. I'm feeling queerly. Where's Grist?

* A Morris dance may be introduced here.

Enter GRIST R. He is black and smudgy.

Grist. Here I be, sir.

Miller. Tell them what happened to you in the forest, Grist.

Grist. That I will, sir. It was this way. [Relates.] I was doing nothing of, as I knows on, same as I always does, your honour. And up he comes.

All. Who?

Grist. And he does it.

All. What?

Grist. And over I goes into the marshy, same as a marshy-marigold. And "would you?" I says, but I couldn't speak. And he laughed, only he wasn't there.

Jack. Ha, ha!

Grist. Nobbut a light jumping. And the bog was white with me, and I was black with it, and wasn't I streaky-like when I got home! Most like a lollipop bull's-eye. Ho, ho!

Jack. Ha, ha! And was that all?

Grist. [stops laughing and gapes at him] Only the flashes like. [Flash: he gapes.] And they birds did whistle rarely.

May. Hush! [A bird-trill heard: then again.] Was it like that, poor boy? [GRIST's gape turns to a grin. He nods slowly. Music heard.]

Bird-song.

Turn again, my bonnie bride,
Your poor bird doth pray you.
Hasten from the robbers' side,
Lest like her they slay you.

Wine so mellow,
White, red, yellow;
She who spied it
May not hide it,
Turn again, my bonnie bride. [Twice.]

Greyskin. How the owls are hooting tonight!
Come now, a good story, spicy, well-seasoned!
Pedlar, where is the ballad you promised us?

Go-between. I'm feeling rather hoarse, your honour. It must be the night air.

Girls. [whispering down L] Was it Nettie singing? Or was it the pedlar's bird? Did you hear what it said?

[All draw away from ROBBERS. MAY only left in center with GREYSKIN.]

Greyskin. Come, will nobody oblige the company? [Pause.]

May. I will, sir.

All. You?

May. Why not, since merriment is needed.
Who should be more merry than I?

Robbers. Who indeed? Ha, ha!

Jack. Hush, behind there! Listen to the bride.

May. It is a dream I had: only a dream. I once thought I was going through a wood on a gray evening, and on, and on, over treacherous ground where I had to pick my way. And I came at last to a dwelling where there was not a soul to be seen, room after room, except a bird in a cage, which cried — "Turn again," very like that owl we heard lately. [GREYSKIN moves.] I only dreamt this, my lord. Then a very old woman appeared, and I asked her — "Does my bridegroom live here?" And she said — "Poor bird, have you fallen in a snare, like the others?" I

only dreamt that, my lord. But she hid me behind a cask. And hardly had she done so, when the most terrible creatures came in, shaggy like wild beasts, and dragging a poor girl with them. And they gave her to drink three wines, red, white and yellow, till she lay for dead upon the ground.

[ROBBERS *rise*.] I only dreamt that, my lord. But there was a gold ring on her hand; and covetous they strove for it. But it flew off into the air, and then dropped behind the cask where I was hiding. And here it is!

[*She holds up ring. Flash of lightning.*
All rise.

Girls. Nettie's ring!

Greyskin and Jack. Lies! Lies!

[GREYSKIN *springs on MAY*.

Miller. Murderer, would you marry my daughter?

[*He stabs GREYSKIN, who staggers and falls dead. Growl from wolves.*
ROBIN and GRIST appear from R. with hatchets, kill GRUFFY who has seized MAY, and drive ROBBERS off the stage: ROBIN, hatchet on shoulder, coming finally back behind R.C. MAY kneels L.C. at GREYSKIN'S head, hands clasped.

Jack. [*dodging GRIST about stage*] Ha, ha!
You'll never catch me!

Go-between. My pennies, my pennies! The wealth of the Castle is mine!

Jack. [*holding up lighted lantern*] Come over the marsh and get it, pedlar! Come over the marsh and get it! [Exit JACK R.

1st Girl. [advancing] But Nettie's ring be-
G

longed to the gypsies, May. It was a magic ring, she told us.

Nettie. [appearing behind C. with bird-cage] Magic!

All. Nettie — our queen!

Nettie. No queen of yours, but the bird-queen. Knew you not that I and your wise bird were one?

All. Our bird!

[*All kneel, grouped, hands up to bird.*
Nettie. May's bird. Will you guess its name?

Bird-song.

Solo.

Turn again, my bonnie bride,
Turn from him thou fearest.
Leave the unhallowed gray wolf's side,
Turn to meet thy dearest.
In the old wood
Here he lingers,
Tainted gold would
Burn his fingers,
He's thy bridegroom, bonnie bride,
Trust your birds, my bonnie bride.

[MAY rises, takes ROBIN'S hand.

Chorus—CHILDREN.

Though he's surly,
Brown and swarthy,

Silly girl, he
Careth for thee,
He's the bridegroom, bonnie bride,
Trust your birds, my bonnie bride!

[*Tableau — Dance — Curtain.*]

DENTRAL CIRCULATION.
CHILDREN'S JOURNAL.

A929056

